

NOVEMBER 30-DECEMBER 6, 2015 NO.1182

THE BIG ISSUE

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A HAND UP NOT A HANDOUT

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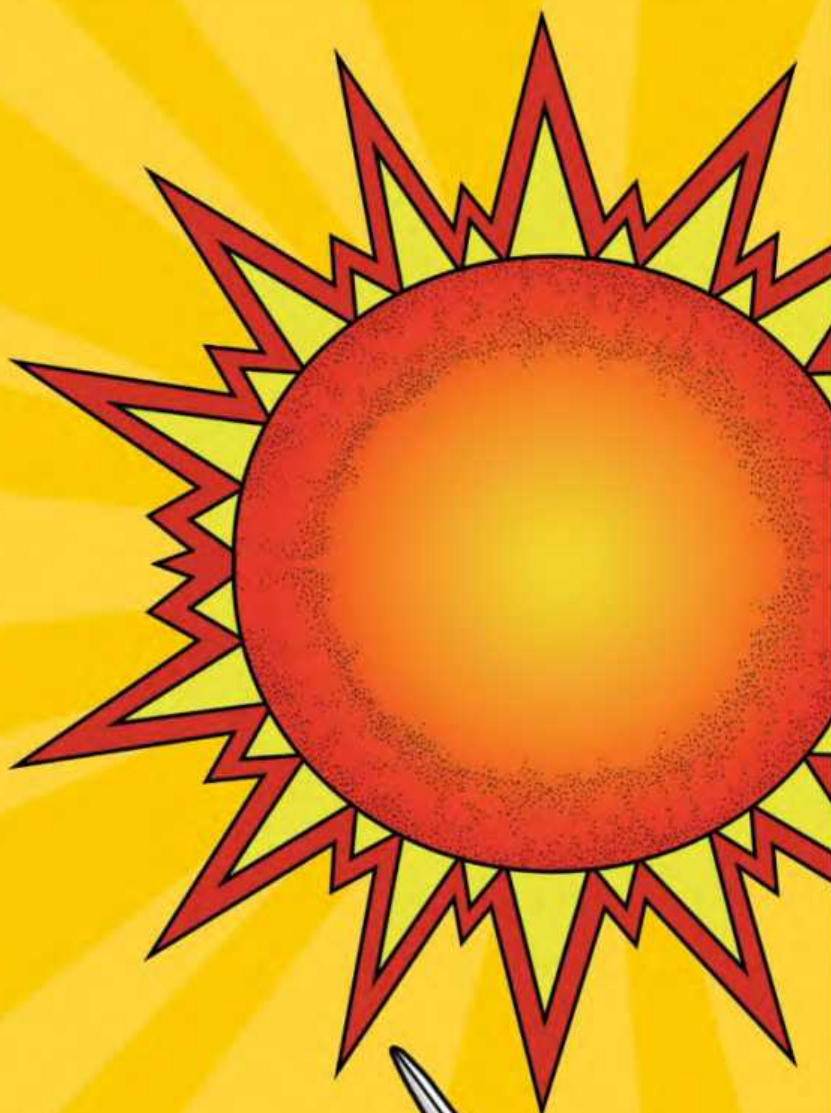
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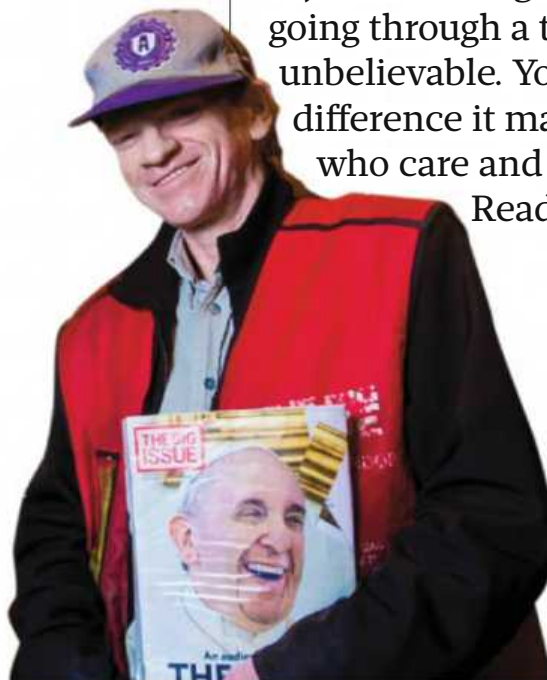
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Hello, my name is Chris.

Selling the magazine has gone really well. It's given me confidence because of the respect you get. And it's given me focus and helped me keep a handle on budgeting. The support my customers gave me when I was going through a tough time has been unbelievable. You've no idea what a difference it makes to have people who care and take an interest...

Read more on page 54.



OUR MANIFESTO

● WE BELIEVE
in a hand up,
not a handout...

Which is why our sellers BUY every copy of the magazine from us for £1.25 and sell it on to you for £2.50 (except at Christmas when it's £1.50 and £3). In this way we have helped hundreds of thousands of people to take control of their lives since 1991, and in the process created a global blueprint for social change.

● WE BELIEVE
in trade, not aid...

Which is why we ask that you ALWAYS take your copy of the magazine – it's a bloody good read and our sellers are working and need your custom.

● WE BELIEVE
poverty is indiscriminate...
Which is why we provide ANYONE whose life is blighted by poverty with the opportunity to earn a LEGITIMATE income.

● WE BELIEVE
in the right to citizenship...
Which is why The Big Issue Foundation, our charitable arm, helps sellers tackle their social and financial exclusion.

● WE BELIEVE
in prevention...
Which is why Big Issue Invest offers backing and investments between £50,000–£1.75m to social enterprises, charities and businesses which deliver social value to communities.



CORRESPONDENCE

Laid bare

It seems Dr Anderson, in her cloistered world [November 16-22], is missing one fact about our world when bemoaning the poor prices commanded by 'sexualised pictures of naked... men', to paraphrase!

We live in a capitalist society, governed by supply and demand. Just like female footballers who complain they aren't paid as much as men, to whom I say when you can fill stadia with tens of thousands, and subsequent TV audiences are in the millions, they'll get paid as much. Then when artists' work showing male nudes is in equal demand to the female equivalent, it will command higher prices.

On her other point, some of Modigliani's work is – subject matter aside – stunningly beautiful. I believe some of Freud's art divides opinion and is not to everyone's taste.

The Big Issue is sold on a capitalist model too, where the demand has been created to fulfil a need. The people selling it would have no market and less hope in life without that process.

David Taylor, Lincolnshire

I just want to say, what a fantastic article by Victoria Anderson in this week's issue, about equal pay and the art world. She hit the nail on the head and made her point with impact.

Louise, Brighton

Sweet little one

My two-year-old daughter and I went to the local Sainsbury's Extra and the lovely guy selling The Big Issue with his dog was there. He spoke to my daughter and they both chatted about his dog. Then my daughter and I went in Sainsbury's to get what we needed and she picks up her usual bag of cookies. On the way out she gives them to the guy and said they were for him and his dog. #heartofgold

Lindsay Rochester, Facebook

@LeOptimist

Had the most interesting conversation with a #BigIssue vendor about the Northern Lights. I hope he does see them some day. #aHandUp #BigLove

Write to: The Big Issue, Second Floor, 43 Bath St Glasgow, G2 1HW

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COMMENT OF THE WEEK

A glowing tribute

Lars Mytting's article on chopping wood [November 16-22] reminded me of the 1980s when, as a family, we took advantage of a local tree affected by Dutch elm disease. My husband chopped and dismembered the fallen tree while my two boys, just five and six years old at the time, helped to pile it onto a trailer to transport it approx one kilometre home. Of course, this took many trailer trips over many days – it was an ancient, large tree! We had always enjoyed open fires in our childhood homes and had built on a chimney to our home – that firewood lasted us many, many years after drying out, a welcome glow that somehow makes you feel warmer than any other form of heat. We did mix the burning of the elm with other woods; *The Firewood Poem* (first published in *The Times*, 1930) details the different burning qualities of our various British trees and has always been a good point of reference for me. Now, 30 years on, I have a woodburner so still enjoy the natural warmth that mother earth can provide.

Rosie Scott, Essex

It is always nice to have a chat with Kelvin, our Berkhamsted Big Issue vendor.

Jo Stevens, Facebook



TACHE-TASTIC

Hi, my name is Bernie Buxton. I sell The Big Issue in Plymouth and am doing Movember to raise awareness of prostate cancer. Here is a picture of me on my pitch.

Load of hot air

It is a pity that you felt the need for journalistic 'balance' [Let it Snow, November 16-22] by giving almost equal coverage to the views of a climate sceptic alongside those views that represent by far the majority of the scientific community. In doing so you imply that the debate is more closely balanced than is, in fact, the case.

G Wild, email

Power hungry

Brendan O'Neill's timely article about meat eaters [November 2-8] was spot on. Though I don't eat red meat myself, the public health advice [about eating meat] and that of other bodies who are trying to dictate our lifestyles can equally be applied to smoking and the ridiculous anti-sugar campaign. These groups wield a power out of all proportion to their public support, and politicians of all parties seem to be afraid to stand up to them and tell them bluntly that they haven't been elected by anyone so should mind their own business. Giving in to their demands only encourages zealots even more.

Steve Lustig, London

@thewidowstanton

Light-ent great Stanley Baxter chats about panto in this week's @bigissue – Love him!

FEEDBACK LOOP

S Mortimer wrote in to tell us [November 16-22] her vendor had given her a silk poppy on a wire stalk because hers fell off. This reader chimes in.

I read with interest the letter titled 'Lest we forget' and was deeply moved by the kind act of Anna [the vendor]. I know all too well the problems of the plastic stalk poppy; being a chauffeur, the seat belt would rip off my poppy. The solution was to buy a poppy pin badge, which I now wear all the year around on my jacket lapels. I noticed a lot of the darts players have adopted the same solution. They cost about £5 but are well worth it.

David King, Camberley

JUST BECAUSE YOU DON'T SEE IT DOESN'T MEAN IT'S NOT DANGEROUS



PNEUMOCOCCAL DISEASE can be life-threatening for some people, so vaccination against it is recommended and free for at-risk adults and children aged over 2 months with the following conditions:

- diabetes (controlled by medication)
- asplenia or dysfunction of the spleen
- chronic respiratory disease
- immunosuppression
- chronic heart disease
- cochlear implants
- chronic kidney disease
- cerebrospinal fluid leaks
- chronic liver disease
- occupational exposure to metal fumes (taking into account exposure control measures in place)

Vaccination is also recommended for anyone aged 65 or over, and as part of the childhood immunisation programme.

If you're at risk, help protect yourself by getting vaccinated.

Reporting of side effects. If you get any side effects, talk to your doctor, pharmacist or nurse. This includes any possible side effects not listed in the package leaflet. You can also report side effects directly via the Yellow Card Scheme at: www.mhra.gov.uk/yellowcard. By reporting side effects you can help provide more information on the safety of this medicine.

THE EDITOR

Let's lend Osborne a hand to get his house in order



I'm going to help George Osborne. He may say he doesn't need it. He's doing fine himself. And, in truth, who am I to argue? That soft shoe shuffle he worked to dance away from tax credit cuts was a *Strictly* special.

And the way he suddenly became the austerity chancellor without austerity – well, that was quite a play.

Still, I'm going to help him.

The house-building plan in Osborne's spending review is a good one. A goal of 400,000 new homes by 2020 is not to be sniffed at. There are a range of needs factored in. Inevitably, this won't be enough and cost will still stop a lot of people who could use a leg-up.

But a mixture of putting off those who'd buy second homes for let by ramping up stamp duty in England and Wales and also extending Help To Buy schemes admits there is a problem to get stuck into, and keeps stock available.

Almost as soon as Osborne made the announcement a warning was sounded. Who will build these houses? The Federation of Master Builders said the drop-off in skills in the industry was so acute that projects already in the works were being put on ice. Experts estimate that some 400,000 skilled workers have left the industry since the recession bit.

The answer, or at least part of it, may be closer than people think. It's not exactly hiding in clear sight, more actually *IN* clear sight.

Since we launched our Fill 'Em Up campaign – our drive to bring empty buildings across Britain back into use as homes – two things have become clear. New builds are only part of

the solution; there are many, many buildings that could be repaired and reused. Also, there are many, many people and groups out there doing this work. Frequently they need only small grants, some help around arcane local planning laws and connections to similar groups trying similar things. There is knowledge and skills to be shared.

Also there is another side. The people working on the buildings are often those who'll benefit from them. On a good number of occasions there are social enterprises driving the projects. Big Issue Invest, the social investment arm of The Big Issue, noticed this early. They began (amongst other things) investing in groups to reskill and also to meet housing needs. The PHASES project, which retrains ex-homeless and ex-service personnel and brings buildings back into use, is one such scheme.

Britain's big leap forward will come through the grassroots and social enterprises. The homebuilding revolution will be seen in the unfashionable, scuffed up buildings that can bring communities alive again – through working them back to life and through those doing the work.

The Big Issue gets this, George. The Big Issue has been working on inventive ways out of society's problems for over 24 years. We know you're busy, we know you have a few things on your mind. So ring us. We're happy to talk any time.

We're on the corner just across from your office...

Paul McNamee is editor of The Big Issue
@pauldmcnamee

Illustration: Lauren Crow

OFF THE GRID...



THE BIG ISSUE: BIGGER THAN 1D!

Last week The Big Issue owned the news. We were trending higher than One Direction on Twitter – and it was thanks to coffee, love and art.

We revealed in last week's magazine our partnership with coffee start-up Change Please. It sees some of our vendors moving on from selling the magazine to training as baristas so they can sell coffees at the Change Please mobile vans across London.

So many readers shared the good news that we felt a bit Kardashian. Such was our power to drive the agenda that Piers Morgan tweeted: "Now trending between Ed Miliband and The Big Issue. That feels ominous." Charming!

Millions of listeners heard Change Please founder Cemal Ezel across radio stations including BBC 5live. Millions more saw John Bird talk about it on ITN London. All manner of papers carried the story. However, their interest in coffee was bested only by their interest in Big Issue love. Our vendor Jack Richardson, who found love while selling the magazine on his pitch in Bristol, made headlines across the globe when he announced his engagement to fiancée Toni. The romance of the year captured the hearts of the nation and was picked up by newspapers from *The Telegraph*, *The Mirror*, *The Sun*, *Express*, *Metro* and *ITV*, and even tugged heartstrings down under, with *Australian Women's Weekly* reporting on it. Read all about Jack's whirlwind week on page 21.

To cap it all, the news that some of Brit Art's heavy hitters – including Turner Prize nominee Jim Lambie – would turn our vendors into art custodians dominated Twitter traffic and headlines in Scotland. Lambie leads a horde of cultural luminaries who will be making one-off original artworks that they'll insert into random copies of our Christmas issue courtesy of Neu! Reekie! arts collective and club night. Another Turner Prize nominee, Marvin Gaye Chetwynd, Scots Makar Liz Lochhead, Frightened Rabbit's Scott Hutchison and many more will be taking part. See bigissue.com for all details.

Owning the news!



FROM THE VAULT... NOV 2006 NO. 721

Cover star Jarvis Cocker talks politics, protest and his pop comeback, telling us: "I've resigned myself to the potential humiliation." We also look at Paul Andrew Williams' new film *London to Brighton* – a street thriller examining moral issues around homelessness.



Illustration: Mitch Blunt

HORATIO CLARE

How to let birdsong lift you

In the gloom before dawn, the radio grim with deaths and threats, and prophesying more rain, I heard a female tawny owl: “Kee-wick! Kee-wick!” Her wild peal seemed a charm against despair. My family love owls – ‘owla’ was one of my son’s first words. The female ‘kee-wicks’, while the male answers ‘hoo-hoo!’

There was no sign of the owl but a heron flew up the valley, and gave her “Zank!” cry, a sound with broken ice in it, and a raven went over, high up. He was silent, no laughing “Pruuk-pruuk!” this morning, but my heart lifted at the sight of his thick outline and diamond-shaped tail.

Irish, Welsh, Norse and Greek mythologies all have ravens as the messengers of the Gods, so I tend to say good day to them at the very least. They are joyful, playful creatures, among

the first birds to breed each year. The worst of winter for us, vile February, is a time of acrobatics (they loop the loop) and sex and nesting for them. This bird made me think of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley’s question to the west wind: “Oh wind, if winter comes, can spring be far behind?” And the rain did not come that day. Instead the sky paled, then hardened into a searing blue, bringing all winter’s colours to their brilliant best, and we set out through the woods, treading over copper leaves and emerald moss.

A pheasant called, “Kok-kok!” It is a proud, priapic shout which seems foolish, given that every predator fancies a bit of pheasant. We spotted a pair feeding, the sun burnishing their plumage so that they glowed fiery amber. A skein of Canada geese went over and a tumble of herring gulls, dreamy

white, made the air’s blue more intense.

Birds have less energy to spend in song in winter, making the rattle of the magpie and the “Chack-chack!” of jackdaws – common sounds – seem precious. Our two-year-old has given my eye for birds a fresh brightness, as they are all new and intriguing to him. We found ourselves crawling through the park’s shrubbery this morning, tempted by a robin as pleased by the game as we were.

These are hard times, cold as cruelty, it sometimes seems. All the more reason to take pleasure from the simple things, and to keep faith with the wheel of the seasons. The fair days will come again.

Horatio Clare’s book *Orison for a Curlew* is out now (Little Toller Books, £12)

THE ‘MAN ON THE MOON’ LIVES NEXT DOOR TO YOU

WE CAN ALL TURN LONELINESS INTO SMILES THIS CHRISTMAS, SAYS MICHELLE MCCRINDLE

Nobody likes to think about getting old, but if you’re lucky it will happen to you. This Christmas one million older people in the UK will be lonely. Loneliness makes you ill and is as bad for your health as smoking. Loneliness is a deep, creeping sadness that fills you with dread when you wake up, knowing the day ahead, and the next, will be filled with your deafening silence. Trapped behind curtains, their old life swept away by age-related frailty, disability and dementia, older people in the UK have never been lonelier.

For 20 years Food Train volunteers have been passionately committed to bringing friendship, fun and smiles into the lives of older people alongside a range of weekly support services; over 80,000 contacts in the last year adds up to lots of smiles. Our befriending service provides trips out, activities, regular clubs, home visits and phone calls.

One 93-year-old lady told us how “life was over with nothing to look forward to” but now she



has new friends and is busier than ever. So this Christmas, share a cuppa with an older neighbour, and I bet it will bring a smile to your face as well as theirs. There isn’t a word for the opposite of loneliness but to me it looks like this. thefoodtrain.co.uk

Michelle McCrindle MBE is from older people’s charity Food Train

● Tell us about a campaign or issue you care about and the change you want. @bigissue; editorial@bigissue.com

GOOD TASTE IS SO LAST SEASON

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HIDDEN BRITAIN

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No.53

Hurst Castle

THE SOLENT, HAMPSHIRE

Hurst Castle has guarded the western approach to the Solent since the reign of Henry VIII. It was built at the end of a long shingle spit and formed part of the protection of the port of Southampton and the naval base at Portsmouth. The narrow gap between the spit and the Isle of Wight creates strong currents with each tide, making passage past the fort by invaders a risky endeavour.

Less than 100 years after its construction it appears to have become somewhat neglected. In 1628 the porter was ordered to stay a ship and although he was “very willing” he “had neither powder nor



shot to do it with, and of his 27 pieces of ordnance not above four or five would do any service, and they but for a shot or two”.

The castle was modernised during the Napoleonic

Wars and massive east and west wing batteries were built during the mid-19th century to house heavy guns. Garrisons were stationed at the castle during both World Wars and it remained part of Britain’s coastal artillery defences until 1956.

Charles I was imprisoned at Hurst Castle in 1648 before being taken to London to his trial and execution.

OS Grid Reference: SZ 317897

Get instructions and OS map for this walk (ID 2461) for free until December 13 at walkingworld.com. Use discount code HB5 to access over 6,000 routes for just £15.



Share your photos of this Hidden Britain and ideas for others @bigissue; editorial@bigissue.com



FORWARD THINKING... Bog-roll breathalyser.

A 13-year-old in the US has invented a gadget to detect if someone has been driving under the influence. Made from a torch, loo roll and digital camera, it’s more effective and less intrusive than breathalysing or blood testing. Krishna Reddy (left) wrote a software programme to measure the constriction of the pupil in a driver’s eye when light is directed at it. It reveals if a person has had alcohol, marijuana, amphetamines, painkillers or sleep aids.

MY
PECCADILLO



REBECCA FRONT SATIRICAL STAR

HARMONY SINGING

Even as a kid I would hear harmonies. It is not something I learnt to do, it is just the way my brain works. I hear harmonies as soon as a song starts playing. It is really strange. I assumed that was how everybody heard music.

I sang with choirs through school. I started out as a singer – not a very trained one but I used to sing jazz and write songs for the Oxford Revue at university. I was in a double act that performed character comedy songs, and used to hear the whole thing in my head – all the chords, the harmonies, everything, as I was writing it.

My personal taste is largely classical music and non-choral, which is hard to harmonise. But I also love songs from the shows – *Guys and Dolls* or anything by Sondheim. Whenever I sing along with the radio, I am constantly harmonising. I do it all the time. I sing for fun. It makes you popular when you are mucking about at home or can



join in with people and create something that sounds good.

These days I hardly ever perform. I joined a choir a couple of years ago. I was always either filming late or filming so early the next morning I had to be in bed by 7pm. After eight months, during which I never made a single meeting, I told them I was leaving. But I would dearly love to sing in a choir again. There is something special about singing with other people.

Rebecca Front stars in *Billionaire Boy*, date tbc, BBC One



**“It’s a great irony that
I hated my breasts.
But these two little
monsters are
just awesome”**

Anastacia

Singer who battled breast cancer

LETTER TO MY YOUNGER SELF

We moved from Chicago to New York City when I was 16. My mother, she was an actress and she'd just got divorced from my stepfather. So that was a big transition for me. I was still quite shy. I was friendly but I wasn't advanced. I couldn't wear anything too risqué or my mom would knock my head off. She's a Chicago Irish woman and she's true-to-core. She kept a tight rein on me and my brother and sister.

I was diagnosed with Crohn's disease when I was 13, which doctors discovered when they went in to investigate a dislodged benign tumour. Otherwise I was a healthy child and once I had my operation I didn't have any Crohn's issues until I was 19 and tried to go on a diet. Basically, I was trying to lose my boobs and my butt. [A producer said] they were not working for the dancer's body, they didn't fit the image. So I was put on this mandatory diet of vegetables and fruit and after three weeks my intestines collapsed. That's when I realised what this condition meant.

I felt very awkward as a teenager. I wanted blue eyes, I wanted to be taller, I wore glasses, I got my chest early and I was very embarrassed about it. I just wasn't the kind of girl I thought guys would want to date. Though in some ways I was okay with that because I didn't want to date any boys anyway. I just wanted to be friends with boys, boys were cool with me. Until we were doing a show in school where we all had to wear these catsuits for a dance routine. I walked into the room, all boobs and bum, and the boys never looked at me the same way again. I was mortified. That's probably when I started wearing my stepfather's shirts, big and baggy, to cover up. I just wanted to stay a kid.

My career started properly when I was 30. I often say I was like a fine wine, I took a long time to mature. I didn't get into make-up or anything girly until I was signed to Sony and they were putting make-up teams in front of me. I would sleep with my make-up on because I was so like – wow! Look at my face! I couldn't believe my face could look like that.

When I think back to the teenage me, I actually really like her. She was extremely innocent about the world, probably for too long. I didn't really understand how things worked out there, not until my career started and I had to make serious decisions. Until then I'd had part-time jobs, I was back and forth to my mom's, and she never put pressure on me to be anything or commit to anything. Maybe she saw talent in me and thought, this one's going to be somebody. But I didn't see for a long time that I might have what it took to take on the Madonnas and the Janet Jacksons.

If I told my teenage self she was going to be a big pop star, she'd just say no way. She just wouldn't believe it in a million years. And she wasn't even dreaming of it. That was my mom's dream, that was not my dream. My mom was singing into the mirror, imagining herself winning all these awards... To think I'd end up living that life! The younger me would be like, what ME? Are you kidding me? Yet I do find myself oddly comfortable with the fame. I feel quite normal. I enjoy being around interesting people, having conversations with interesting people. And in a way I still feel I'm like that 16-year-old, not knowing exactly what's going on.

Anastacia performs on *Strictly Come Dancing*; with Sir Elton John at Madison Square Garden in 2000



My career happened so fast I don't think I realised how big I was until I was already going back down the ladder and people were saying, hey, what happened to her? I think while it was happening I was so busy, and trying to please everyone, I was not in the now. Now I am in the now. And enjoying what's happening each moment, giggling like a school-girl, thinking – this is cool, I'm signing my own name on my own CD. These fans are outside my hotel and they told me they're following me around for 17 dates and I'm like oh my God, seriously?! It's fun.

If I really wanted to knock my younger self out, I'd tell her about singing with Elton [as a special guest at Elton's Greatest Hits Live show in New York]. Oh my God, are you kidding me? That moment, to this day, is my favourite moment in my life. I still remember singing along to his albums out of the window of my house when I was a kid. So wow, the feeling of thinking – I am here, onstage, singing with him right now. I'm looking at him like my mom looked at his album cover. We sang Saturday Night's Alright for Fighting. In truth, in my nervousness on stage, I got some of the words wrong. And he was like, oh my God, you couldn't even sing the right words, you old cow! That's what he calls me, old cow. We have such a laugh together. I still giggle if he calls me.

It's a great irony in my life that I absolutely hated my breasts and then I got breast cancer. [After two bouts of cancer Anastacia had a double mastectomy in 2013]. These two little monsters – now I call them my twin set and they are just awesome. Now I'm just so very proud to be a woman. I'm extremely blessed – breast cancer brought more femininity my way than I knew what to do with. I had been so scared of it but now I embrace it. At the beginning of my career I was like, I'm a sex symbol? Oh my God, eww! I want people to respect me for my talent and my mind. Now I'm like, totally disrespect me, see me as a dumb blonde if you want. I'm enjoying being a wee bit Marilyn – 'Ooh, can you open the door, it's just so heavy!' It's sometimes fun to feel like that because before I was always like, hey you, I got the door!

I used my mother's Irish sense of humour to get through the cancer treatment. What else could I do, it was my life. I found the ridiculous in everything. I still do. Just before I got on the phone with you I cracked my front tooth. Everyone around me is saying, oh my God, we must find a dentist before we do *Strictly*. And I'm thinking, now I can properly say 'thuffering thuccotash', which weirdly I was saying all day yesterday because I was wearing a Sylvester the Cat T-shirt. Because, you know, I can afford to fix the tooth. It'll be okay.

Anastacia's *Ultimate Collection* is out now. The Ultimate Collection Tour starts at the London Palladium on May 2; anastacia.com. Interview: Jane Graham @Janeannie

IN 1984, THE YEAR ANASTACIA TURNS 16... Band Aid records Do They Know It's Christmas? / The Aids virus is identified / An IRA bomb explodes at the Conservative Party conference in Brighton



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Dickens was the master of humbug hypocrisy



'Humbug' is a favoured Dickensian word. It gets thrown around a lot at Christmas.

Especially around that much-loved Charles Dickens story, *A Christmas Carol*. That terrible humbug Ebenezer Scrooge, based on the man who started The Peabody Housing Trust and JP Morgan (at one time the richest investment bank in the world), really needed converting to goodness. He got his predictable comeuppance in the course of Dickens' story of the fight between good and evil.

Yet there was always something sad at the centre of Dickens. Something desperate and needy. He was appalling to his first wife, and at times to others of his nearest and dearest. His biography shows that he was damaged by his early years in a boot-blackening factory while his father and mother languished in debtors' prison.

Likewise the recent Steve Jobs film shows this same sadness at the heart of Jobsville, Jobs' deifying community he created around himself; leading him according to the film to denying his 96 per cent certain daughter.

Having just finished *Death and Mr Pickwick*, about the creation of *The Pickwick Papers* and then going to see the Jobs film, I was astonished how both Dickens and Jobs really milked that wounded child thing. And as one who likewise used the 'wounded child' excuse for poor-quality social behaviour for years, I can understand why they do it. It's a kind of permanent 'get out of jail' card. You can't though keep allowing the demons to give you licence to be an 'arse'. You have to grow beyond damage, and it seemed neither Jobs or Dickens could.

Jobs being abandoned to adoption as a babe must have screwed the mainframe, somewhat. And Dickens' ugly descent from middle class to working class child labourer seemed to have seized up a part of his sense of justice.

Stephen Jarvis' *Death and Mr Pickwick* is a convincing exposé of the 'humbug' at the heart of Dickens himself. Whereas

Dickens could invent fictive Bob Cratchit and Tiny Tim and engender buckets of tears over their plight, he could equally ignore a real widow and her real-life mites.

The Dickens Museum in Doughty Street in central London is a three-storey house that Dickens moved into from cramped rooms nearby at Furnival's Inn. He also got the money to marry the woman he was eventually to bitterly denounce and humiliate.

Before the success of *The Pickwick Papers* Dickens made next to nothing out of his fictional writing. Pickwick was his bonanza. And it laid the foundation stone for his incredibly successful fiction-producing career.

The problem central to Dickens' world is that the originator of Pickwick was the artist Robert Seymour. He came up with

"He could invent fictive Tiny Tim and engender buckets of tears over his plight, while ignoring a real widow and her mites"

the idea of Pickwick in his drawings of the character and the idea of a club of incompetents. Yet Dickens conspired to deny Seymour the rights and the income.

He did it in the worst of possible ways. He denied Seymour's widow recognition and income because two days after an apparent bust up with Dickens Seymour committed suicide.

The Pickwick Papers went on to become one of the most popular books ever published, more popular than anything Dickens subsequently wrote.

What a miscarriage of justice! An unknown writer is given the chance to write the words to Seymour's characters, only then for the writer to take over.

And Dickens' attempts at taking over Seymour's invention probably drove the artist to his death.

Jobs' denial of the importance of Wozniak in starting Apple has an element of the Dickens/Seymour scenario. Both Dickens and Jobs, labouring under that wounded child view of the world, grasped all and denied others authorship and importance. And did their best to make it look as if they were the main progenitors.

What is a crying shame is that both Dickens and Jobs were brilliant at what they did. Neither Wozniak nor Seymour could have taken their respective products to the heights their denying collaborators took. But because of the deep injuries of Dickens and Jobs it seemed they could never share with those that deserved it.

Apparently Dickens sent Widow Seymour £5 and told her not to bother him any more. She died in poverty, so did her daughter. And her son committed suicide at the age of 74, feeling cursed and destroyed by Pickwick.

So Dickens, it would seem, could deny a real family on hard times but equally could lavish sentiments ad nauseam on something made up.

'Humbug' suits the creator of *A Christmas Carol* as much as his creation Ebenezer Scrooge. And it shows also how ugly was that early Victorian hypocrisy that allowed mass poverty to continue, yet allowing at the same time a window dressing through tear-jerking propaganda like *A Christmas Carol*.

No wonder Dickens was sad at heart, dying relatively young; because he knew underneath it all he had some 'humbug' at the core. What a weight to carry that your prosperity was based on the imagination of others.

So beware of Victorians crying 'humbug' of all but themselves. But you must read *Death and Mr Pickwick*, my book of the year. It is the work of a genius.

John Bird is the founder and Editor in Chief of The Big Issue. john.bird@bigissue.com @johnbirdswords. *Death and Mr Pickwick* by Stephen Jarvis is out now (Jonathan Cape, £20)

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How real is the threat of 'blackout Britain' this Christmas?



Every year, as the darkest and coldest days draw in, newspapers scream warnings over the state of our energy security.

“WINTER BLACKOUT FEAR: UK at risk as National Grid suffers multiple plant breakdowns,” shouted the *Daily Express* at the start of this month. “Osborne’s green taxes blamed for power supplies falling to danger level,” thundered the *Mail on Sunday*.

This month’s headlines came after National Grid was forced to spend more than £2.5m on back up supplies, when reserves ran low one day in early November. At no point did National Grid engineers warn we were at risk of blackouts.

In the past decade nearly 500 articles have warned of the risks of blackouts, when in fact real power cuts have proved vanishingly rare.

So are we really on the brink of being plunged into darkness? And are green taxes genuinely to blame if the lights do go out?

It is no secret that capacity margins this year will be at their lowest in a decade, with National Grid admitting the gap between supply and demand is just 1.2 per cent. Standby measures built into the system increase that gap to 5.1 per cent.

But compare that to the 16.8 per cent margin in winter 2011/2012 and it’s easy to see why you might be worried. How did our capacity margins get so tight?

This squeeze is caused by old, dirty coal plants shutting as part of government efforts to tackle climate change, coupled with decades of underinvestment in the power system to replace coal with cleaner sources.

With the government last week committing to phase out all coal plants by 2025, capacity margins are set to get even tighter over the coming years. Energy and Climate Change Secretary Amber Rudd promised to try and bring forward investment in gas plants and nuclear power but it remains to be seen if and when these will be delivered.

Energy companies have been reluctant to invest in new gas power plants, while the new reactors at Hinkley Point C have faced repeated delays and are now expected to

come online in the mid-2020s, instead of 2017 as originally planned. Even more concerning is that these reactors – described as the most expensive power plant ever built – will use outdated technology and put the UK’s energy needs into the hands of France’s EDF and China’s state-owned General Nuclear Power.

Meanwhile, some commentators continue to claim intermittent wind farms are to blame for the capacity crunch. Was it simply a slow wind day that led National Grid to call for backup?

No. National Grid said the emergency was a result of several outages at fossil fuel plants that day – coal and gas to be precise, certainly not renewables.

In fact many ‘blackout Britain’ media reports are largely unfounded. Research by the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit earlier this year found that nearly all power cuts in the UK are due to faults in local distribution networks, typically caused by bad weather or contractors accidentally cutting through underground cables.

“Nearly all power cuts in the UK are due to faults in local networks, such as bad weather or contractors cutting through cables”

As Chris Goodall and Mark Lynas pointed out in *The Guardian*, the event this month actually shows that the UK relies too heavily on a handful of large power plants and that smaller generators such as wind turbines, creating a more decentralised energy system, are more resilient.

Not to mention that both Denmark and Germany experience fewer outages than in the UK, despite far higher proportions of intermittent renewables such as wind and solar being used.

And National Grid seems confident about a suite of measures it has lined up for the next low power emergency, which will help keep the lights on while reducing our carbon emissions at the same time, delivering a win for the environment and the economy.

One of these measures, already widely used in other countries including the USA, involves paying certain companies to turn down their power demand at a moment’s notice. This technique, known as demand response, or ‘negawatts’ is usually deployed on non-critical businesses. For example a cold storage company could lose power for up to a day without causing damage to its frozen foods, while other companies could initiate downtime for shorter periods.

Crucially, many of these companies are happy to take part in these innovative smart grid measures, viewing it as an opportunity to boost their income rather than a burden that will lose them business.

The government has also launched a Capacity Market, which pays generators to build new back-up plants that can be switched on in a crunch.

So next time our papers scream blackout warnings at us, how worried should we be that we are set for a return to the three-day weeks of the 1970s? Probably not as worried as those editors would like.

The next couple of winters are likely to have record tight margins but the fairy lights will almost certainly stay on and you will still be able to cook a turkey on Christmas Day.

Jessica Shankleman is deputy editor of BusinessGreen businessgreen.com
@JessicaBG



VIEW OF BUILDING

BY PAUL GORMAN

Jeremy Deller: I really like this. I can totally understand it. This kind of work is the kind of work I would make if I was painting – something like a fantasy almost of a building, almost like he's a frustrated architect. I like the simplicity of it, there's a lot of charm about it. It's quite heartfelt as well. You can see he really enjoyed making it.



MEDICINE LEAVES

BY ROBYN FORMAN

James Brett: The aesthetic medicine of Robyn Forman soothes both doer and viewer. The making of the art, like the taking of the leaves, is a healer. How rare to see so much in just a little piece of paper.

STREET ART ON SHOW

We think it's great, but what do the experts make of it? We asked four top names to pick out some of their favourite artwork featured in The Big Issue



L-R
James Brett, Waldemar Januszczak, Jeremy Deller, Miranda Sawyer



AMY WINEHOUSE

BY BRYONY FRY

Jeremy Deller: This is quite interesting. It's quite a traditional image of Amy Winehouse, and then you have behind it this sort of bleeding almost, a quite fraught colour scheme. Like blood dripping down, quite acidic. That's quite an interesting combination – that graphic and then this sort of abstract. That works really well.



ON TORSO

BY MARY VALLELY

Jeremy Deller: I really like Torso, I have to say. I love the blue in it. That's definitely something I can live with – beautiful, really beautiful. I almost look at it as an abstract, it's teetering on the edge. Using black as well – you don't see that very much in paintings, the use of black. She's got a really good sense of colour. Really great, very sophisticated.

Every week in Big Issue Street Art we publish artworks by talented creatives on the margins of society, from the homeless and ex-homeless to people who struggle with mental health conditions or addiction. This is real outsider art and we think it's first class. But there is always a chance we don't know what we're talking about. So we asked four respected heavy hitters from the British art top table to run the rule over some of our favourite pieces from 2015 and to share some of their reflections and opinions on the work.

James Brett, founder of the Museum of Everything, said The Big Issue was the “benevolent glue” of his project – a platform and voice for untrained, non-traditional so-called “accidental artists” who prove that art doesn't always have to be art by design. “To give a private art-maker time, to hear that personal narrative, to display the handmade object, these actions privilege the most secret of languages,” he said.

“What's striking here is how many of the pictures are about people and places – humans and homes,” said art critic and broadcaster Waldemar Januszczak. “Given how many of these artists have endured or continue to endure episodes of homelessness, it's tempting to see a connection.”

“Just because someone is technically capable doesn't mean they're going to make good, expressive, interesting art,” said Turner Prize-winning artist Jeremy Deller. “You get a sense from a lot of the work here that they really enjoyed making it. Really the best way to make art is to do your own thing and just enjoy it. A lot of the best art is made that way.”

“Big Issue Street Art would be a worthwhile project whether or not anyone saw the art,” said journalist, broadcaster and former Turner Prize judge Miranda Sawyer. “Creativity is a process, and that process does something to the mind: it heals, it connects, it inspires, it calms. But the results are important too. These pictures should be seen because these works are great.” >

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STRONG BEER BY ANDREW HOWARD

Waldemar Januszczak: Andrew Howard's beer-fuelled journey across the skyline is a picture about people and their relationship to places. It's a happy picture. But happy in a beery way. In the end, what you notice is that all the windows have lights in them. And that the man on the beer can is flying past the lot.

Jeremy Deller: It's important to have a bit of humour in a work, there's no harm in that. You could imagine him having a career as a commercial artist from this sort of work – faux naïve I'd call it, because it looks very simple, whereas it's actually very sophisticated and funny as well. From the nice use of colour and the silhouetting and so on, it could almost be from a children's book illustration or something.

SIAMESE TWINS

BY PAUL BELLINGHAM

Miranda Sawyer: Despite the attractive colours and calm facial expressions of the Siamese twins, I find this picture very unsettling. We've all felt like this: as though we have different parts to ourselves and sometimes they refuse to unite. As though there is more than one person in our brain, that we're all of a jumble and we don't make sense, even though we present a bright and benign face to the world.

Jeremy Deller: It's not necessarily a work I'd want on my wall, but maybe he's not making work like that. He's definitely looking at how to manipulate and change the human figure, that's without a doubt. The artists he's interested in also do that. So I can see where he's coming from. I also like the way he's coloured this in a very unusual way.

PARLOUR GAMES BY RENE ROBBINS

Jeremy Deller: This abstract I really like. She's the daughter of an architect, and you can kind of tell in a way. Abstract artworks are actually very difficult to make. They're not just a squiggle on a piece of paper, they're incredibly finely balanced things, and she's done a really great job of that here. There's lots of energy and movement in it, and I appreciate that.

Miranda Sawyer: Beautiful, clear, summer colours. A boat or a tent? People travelling? Obstacles piled up in front of us, or a bird's eye view? This picture has order in it but it's amazingly lively, it's full of movement even though it's abstract. It's almost like a small part of a larger picture, a snapshot. You could spend a long time looking at this.

Street Art is created by people who are marginalised by issues like homelessness, disability and mental health conditions. Contact streetlights@bigissue.com to see your art here.



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BIG ISSUE LOVE STORY GOES GLOBAL

Vendor Jack Richardson popped the question on his pitch and captured the heart of the world's media. After a whirlwind week he tells **Andrew Burns** why this will be his first happy Christmas

A Big Issue love story made international headlines last week as the tale of a vendor's engagement captured hearts across the world. Bristol seller Jack Richardson, 37, asked his girlfriend Toni Osborne to marry him at his pitch after the pair met at the same spot at Christmas two years ago while he was selling the magazine and sleeping rough.

Their touching story was featured everywhere from the BBC to *The Sun*, all the way to *Australian Women's Weekly*.

"It's been completely overwhelming," Jack says.

"My head is still spinning. People I've never met before have been coming up to me on the street to shake my hand or say congratulations. The reaction from the public has been unrelentingly positive, which has made all the stress and chaos worthwhile."

The happy couple first met when Jack asked Toni to buy a magazine in December 2013, however she broke down in tears, explaining her own difficulties paying her electricity meter. This led to kindhearted Jack offering a small sum of his earnings to make sure she didn't have to spend Christmas in the dark.

They soon got talking on a regular basis. Then, last



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- 5 You have helped someone in a developing country improve the lives of their whole family and both you and your friend get a nice warm feeling.



Christmas, the comfy corner of an underground car park where Jack was sleeping got boarded up.

"I was in dire straits, facing sleeping outside again," Jack recalls. "But Toni – this amazing woman who I had been speaking to – offered to put me up for a couple of months. So I moved into her place and my life changed completely. We started getting close, and slowly but surely we fell head over heels in love with one another."

Jack and Toni's relationship has blossomed this year, allowing Jack to embark on an Open University course in social sciences while continuing to sell the magazine to help him get by.

And last month Jack proposed to Toni by going down on one knee while on his pitch in Park Street. "I did it in front of a lot of my customers, and thankfully Toni said yes," Jack laughs. "I'm blown away by it all."

"When we first met I was sleeping in a car park but she saw past that," adds Jack. "She made a human connection. She really is an amazing woman."

"We're beginning to make plans now for a wedding next year. One of my customers is a Church of England vicar who says he'll officiate, one of my customers is a hairdresser who will do Toni's hair, and another is a photographer who says he'll do the photos for us."

"Then last week a gentleman who organises parties and events gave me his card when I was selling the Issue."

He'd read our story and said he can help with a venue and sound system for the party. It's unbelievable. People can be so generous."

For now, Jack is busy selling The Big Issue seven days a week and is hoping for a prosperous festive period – a crucial time of year for our vendors. However, he insists he'll take a day off to enjoy Christmas Day at home with his bride-to-be.

"Christmas can be a successful time for us vendors, we can earn more money which helps with the rest of the year and the rainy days. But it can also be a very lonely time."

"I've worked selling the Issue on Christmas Day for the last number of years. It was just another day. People are always friendly and can be very generous, which is wonderful, but at the end of the day when you've got nobody or nothing to go home to, it's really hard."

"This will be our first Christmas alone together and I can't wait. It's going to be very special."

"I can't remember the last time I felt this way. My mum died when I was 13 and I was put into care. I've suffered from severe depression and, to be honest, I didn't think I had it in me any more to feel good. I haven't been this happy in all of my adult life."



'YOU FEEL SO LONELY AT CHRISTMAS'

It's not about presents and family for everyone, as Big Issue vendors Cathy and Lee show in a new documentary

Big Issue vendors Cathy Johnson and Lee Sims take centre stage in a major new documentary sharing the stories of people across the UK faced with difficult circumstances at Christmas.

After featuring Cathy's story in the magazine last year, filmmakers got in touch



to document her life on the street. She became homeless in early 2014 after losing her job at a mortgage broker and decided to move from Cornwall to Oxford believing it would be easier to find work, but within days she was forced to sleep rough.

"Selling the magazine helped me get enough money to get by," she says. "Without The Big Issue I don't know what I would have done, it's really helped me get my confidence back."

Cathy met Lee who also was also a Big Issue vendor and the couple looked out for each other as they struggled to find a safe place to sleep at night. Events took a dramatic turn in November last year. Cathy and Lee had been invited to stay on a boat on the Thames but one night the boat caught fire and the pair had to jump overboard. They were lucky enough to escape with minor injuries but lost everything they owned and tragically, Cathy's 12-year-old border collie Storm died in the fire. The picture of Cathy and Storm was taken a few weeks earlier.



L-R: Cathy selling the magazine last Christmas; the pair lost everything in a fire; with her beloved Storm

The following month, filmmakers started documenting Cathy and Lee's life. The Channel 5 programme, called *At Christmas*, follows a number of people through December and during the festive period itself.

"Being ignored on the street any time of the year is hard but at Christmas it's more tough," Cathy says. "Around this time of year you feel so lonely. You see everybody buying their Christmas presents, they're going to be with their families, going to have a great time and a nice Christmas dinner. When you don't have any of that you feel so lonely."

"People just don't stop to think about the actual reality of it all," Cathy adds. "It is ignorance rather than lack of people caring – they just don't know."

Cathy and Lee now sell The Big Issue in Bath. **TEB**

The first episode of *At Christmas* will be broadcast on December 3 on Channel 5

'OUR STORY TOUCHED SO MANY HEARTS, IT BLOWS MY MIND'

Ex-Big Issue vendor James Bowen and his furry friend Bob have had an incredible journey from street to screen. You helped to do this – and now they're saying thanks

Bob and I are especially thankful this Christmas. We have got a new movie being made on our lives and a paperback version of *A Gift From Bob* has been released to cap an incredible year.

This Christmas we will be celebrating with family and friends. But I will also reflect on how grateful we are for everything we've been given, meditate on those who are not as blessed as we are and take joy in giving to others – the true meaning of Christmas. I will never forget those brutally cold winters when I didn't have enough money to keep the heating on or buy food.

Before Bob came into my life eight years ago, the streets were my home. My thoughts this Christmas are with the thousands of dispossessed people who don't have a warm room to stay in, a bed to lie in or a hot meal to sustain them. My time on the streets will always be a part of me. But for every individual that turns a blind eye, there is someone caring like you, reading *The Big Issue* right now and supporting a great cause.

It's been nearly five years since a chance encounter with a literary agent changed my life forever. To feel worthy of such good fortune, I still wake up every morning and pinch myself. I won't lie, there have been a few ups and downs along the way. But I am so much happier when I look in the mirror. I see a better person who can admit his errors and learn from his mistakes. Someone who may not be perfect but who strives for excellence: a code my godparents taught me the value of when I was a tearaway teen but always held on to.

The fact that my book has touched so many hearts just blows my mind. I wouldn't be where I am right now if it wasn't for the fantastic fans and I would never take them for granted. Nearly 900 people turned up

to see Bob and I at a recent book signing and we have some of the most passionate social media followers I've ever come across.

Bob just takes all of this in his stride. We'll be on our way to an interview and he'll look up at me, as if to say: "You can do this, buddy." And I look back at him and think – with you by my side, Bob, I can do anything. I look back every day and I thank Bob for how he has dramatically changed my life for the better. Not just with the books but before any of this. When he would watch over me like a little angel, when he would encourage me to rest when I was on the streets and suffering from deep vein thrombosis... We've gone from selling *The Big Issue* and busking on the streets of London to that day in March 2012 – my birthday, by the way, what a magical coincidence! – when my first book was officially launched!

I'll never forget how proud I felt when I was told *A Street Cat Named Bob* had hit the number one spot on *The Sunday Times*

bestseller list. Since then, we've had continued success with *The World According to Bob*, *My Name is Bob*, *Bob to the Rescue* and *A Gift From Bob*. Now a movie motion picture, directed by Roger Spottiswoode and produced by Adam Rolston, is slated for release in 2016.

As we all celebrate the festive period I would ask you to think about those who are less fortunate than ourselves. Next time you pass a Big Issue vendor, please, please, please stop to buy a magazine from them. Or even just chat to them for a minute, give them a little bit of your time. It makes the world of difference.

Bob and I love you all for your continued support and wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a healthy and happy New Year. **TBI**



Illustration: Charis Tsevis

A Gift from Bob is out now (Hodder & Stoughton, £7.99)



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WIN A SIGNED COPY OF OUR BOB COVER!

The last time Bob featured on the cover of The Big Issue we were inundated by thousands of Bobites across the globe asking to buy copies of the magazine. There was so much interest, we decided to spread a bit of Bob-love, and invited readers to send us pictures of their own cats, either reading their copy of 'The Bob Issue' or just doing their own thing, which is of course what cats do best.

We were amazed by the response – hundreds of people from all corners of the world emailed and tweeted us their paw-some photos. James mentioned our quest for photos of Bob fans on his Facebook page and on Twitter and we were swamped – it became planet of the cats!

If you look very closely at the cover of this magazine you will see them collated into a purr-fect collage by Greek artist Charis Tsevis – who in 2013 created a beautiful collage of Santa for our Christmas cover, composed of photographs of Big Issue vendors from around the country.

This year it's over to fans of Bob and James – and each and every one is now a part of Bob's story.

tsevis.com

We have 10 amazing signed cover images to give away – you can win one at [Facebook.com/bigissueuk](https://www.facebook.com/bigissueuk)

Tsevis

STREET CAT TO SILVER SCREEN

From Big Issue vendor to bestselling author to the big screen... James and Bob's story is set to take cinemas by storm next year. The film version of James' bestselling *A Street Cat Named Bob* book is being filmed at locations around London right now with *Tomorrow Never Dies* and *Turner & Hooch* director Roger Spottiswoode is at the helm.

The rights to the film were snapped up in 2012 shortly after the book hit the bestseller lists at a time when James and Bob were still busking on the streets of London. In the film, James is being played by Luke Treadaway, who won an Olivier award for his role in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Undoubtedly there will have been plenty of curious incidents with cats during filming – Bob is playing himself but with the help of eight specially trained cat doubles, while James is advising on the film.

The film co-stars Ruta Gedmintas (pictured right, alongside Luke as James with the real James and Bob!) as well as *Downton Abbey*'s Joanne Froggatt and Anthony Head, of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fame.

Before the film has even wrapped, international distribution rights have been secured, ensuring that it will be released in territories around the world including Europe, Australia and Latin America.

All of this means that the growth in Street Cat mania is set to continue. Keep reading The Big Issue throughout 2016 for updates on James and Bob's next exciting chapter...



BOB, MEET BUB – ANOTHER CAT SENSATION



Laura Kelly meets the owner of Lil Bub – the moggy who interviewed Michelle Obama and counts De Niro as a friend



Top: James Bowen with Luke Treadaway and Ruta Gedmintas, who plays his girlfriend Betty in the film. Inset: Treadaway and Froggatt on location. Below: Anthony and Bob relaxing between takes



If ever you've been sceptical about the power of the online kitty, you need only look to Belgium's response to the recent national emergency. Resilient Belgians reacted by taking to Twitter and flooding the hashtag #BrusselsLockdown with funny cat pictures. Intended to drown out operational details about police raids that could possibly have helped the terror suspects, the cats were also a perfect retort, meeting terror with humour – and cuteness.

This response was proof again that cats rule the internet. And so it is that I'm interviewing Indiana native Mike Bridavsky about his cat – one of the world's most famous felines – and her new album. (Yes, you read that right. The cat has an album. It's called *Science & Magic*, and it's really rather good.)

With her saucer eyes and sticky-out tongue, perma-kitten Lil Bub became an internet sensation after Mike uploaded her photo to Reddit back in 2011. Today the 'magical space cat' has more than 2.3 million likes on Facebook, has interviewed Michelle Obama on her own internet TV show, has 'written' a book, starred in a film and inspired legions of fans to donate lots of money to animal charities.

As Mike says, she "brings people such happiness. Pure, simple, innocent happiness and joy on a daily basis".

The runt of a feral litter, who would have died but for Mike's intervention, Bub's unusual looks are the result of a series of genetic abnormalities. Hers is truly a story of triumph against the odds – though, as Mike reveals, she's still facing challenges.

What was making the album like? It was a positive, fun project. It was about getting cool sounds and getting Bub's magic captured on a record. I think it turned out great.

It was an incredible coup to have Michelle Obama on *Lil Bub's Big Show*. What was she like? Their team

contacted me about participating in the Let's Move campaign [which aims to combat childhood obesity]. I pitched an idea that we would fly about and Bub and Michelle would do all this stuff together and it was going to be very funny. Well, naturally, they nixed it. I wrote the episode, they pre-recorded the video. Bub and Michelle were never in the same room at the same time. Sorry to spoil the magic!

One of the big celebrities I know you did meet was Robert De Niro. He's been lucky enough to have a Bub cuddle. That

was at Tribeca Film Festival 2013. We're surrounded by the media and press and it's very hectic. He says: "Is it okay if I hold your cat?" Now, I'm very protective over Bub. It doesn't matter if it's the President or Robert De Niro, I have to be like, "I can only let you hold her if you let me show you how to hold her properly". He paused for a second, and then said: "Okay." So I held his hand the right way. He had the softest hands I've ever touched, like, softer than my wife. You can tell from the photo, Bub liked him.

How has Bub changed your life? Completely. She's taught me to care for someone more than I care for myself. Through Bub, I met my wife – I now have a child.

These are all things I wasn't sure would ever happen. I truly believe that I saved Bub's life, and this is how she repays me.

How is Bub keeping at the moment?

Last week she actually fell and broke her elbow. It's been a very, very, very hard week for us. She had surgery. We had complications during surgery but she made it. We had the best surgeons in the state. It was the first surgery of its kind because of her bone condition. She's got part of her body shaved and she's a little drowsy but she's great. That's the thing about her; she's the most determined little creature in the world. **ITB**

Lil Bub's *Science & Magic* is out on December 4 (Joyful Noise)



Top: Mike with Lil Bub. Below: Robert De Niro gets to hold the moggy

HOW DO YOU MAKE A FILM STAR INVISIBLE?



Even Richard Gere disappears into the crowd when he's playing a rough sleeper. But now film-makers are opening their eyes to the homelessness crisis – Gere and fellow stars Peter Mullan and Paul Bettany tell us why

Richard Gere is one of the most famous faces in cinema but during the making of his latest film, *Time Out of Mind*, in which he plays George, a homeless man living on the streets of New York, he found himself being completely ignored by passers by.

"I was invisible in New York," he says. "Because I was this character, people decided within two blocks of seeing me that I was homeless, and didn't look any further. No one made any eye contact. It was confusing and profound. If Richard Gere, who has money and fame – and in this situation everyone thinks kindly about me – if I can stand on a street corner and be treated like garbage? That's a profound lesson for me personally but for an audience it should be as well. It radically changed my view of myself and of the social fabric around me."

Gere shared his experiences making the film during a private screening with vendors from *One Step Away*, a street paper like The Big Issue but based in

Philadelphia. Gere believes "vendors have done something heroic. They've pulled themselves out of a very deep ditch, they're survivors".

Like buses, you wait ages for a film focusing on homeless characters then several show up at once. Out now is Maggie Smith's quirky vagabond in Alan Bennett's cosy and quaint *The Lady in the Van*, which will be followed by *Hector*, starring Peter Mullan. "It is an important subject to tackle," Mullan says. "When you

are so disenfranchised, there's so little you can do. You can only exist for the absolute immediate moment, and that is when you become invisible. We all make assumptions about people on the street. You see some poor soul lying there and think he must be a junkie or an alcoholic. Sadly, we see more and more people just rubbering, as we say, the homeless, be they Roma, be they Caucasian Scots, be they the recent emergé of whatever ethnic

group. They are being ignored."

The film follows *Hector's* pilgrimage from Scotland to London to celebrate Christmas with his sister. "The character's journey is the thing Jake [Gavin, *Hector's*





MAKE HIM HOMELESS

director] and I worked on,” Mullan explains. “At one point the script had alcoholism as being what pushed Hector over the edge but that was the glaringly obvious one. My sister worked with the homeless for a long time. I met a lot of homeless guys who didn’t drink and didn’t smoke but had mental health issues, be they temporary or long term. They couldn’t cope with their responsibility in the world.

“Now we have this horrendous housing crisis, where regardless of mental abilities or addictions we are back to a *Cathy Come Home* situation, where we have whole families being evicted because of benefit cuts and sanctions. The next big epidemic is going to be homelessness. I feel I have to talk out. In the ’80s the movie industry got into ‘greed is good’ and Wall Street, which made it look incredibly glamorous. It has always been the case. And it always will be if we allow their voices to reign and if we don’t have honest, original responses to it.”

Homelessness has been a big issue for a long time but rarely makes for big box office. *Hector’s* producer Stephen Malit describes the difficulty securing distribution. “We premiered at Edinburgh Film Festival and got good reviews,” he says. “We screened it to distributors but the nature of the film industry at



Richard Gere (left) in *Time Out of Mind*; Peter Mullan (top left) as Hector; Maggie Smith in *The Lady in the Van*

the moment is you’re either big or you’re no one. We had a couple of offers but they were pretty lousy. So many will put it out but they won’t get behind it. So I got together with a cinema booker, we went to the BFI, who adored it, and we’re putting it out in partnership from December 11.”

Hector is one of the few brave enough to battle *Star Wars* at the box office. “Literally everybody said you are insane trying to release a small art film at Christmas,” Malit says. “But let’s try, nobody else is going to do it! I’d like to think there’s a market for social realist films. I grew up in the ’80s, and whether it was music or fashion shows – everything had something to say. We’ve gone bland.”

In an industry that loves shiny escapist blockbusters, why have some film-makers suddenly discovered homelessness? Paul Bettany, best known from *Master and Commander*, *A Beautiful Mind* and as Vision in the Marvel films, makes his directorial debut with *Shelter*, set against the homelessness crisis in New York. He believes the problem has become so great that film-makers can no longer ignore it. “Art is a response to the culture in which you live,” he says. “Since the crash of 2008 the homelessness crisis is crazy, it’s everywhere. You’d have to be blind >



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HOMELESS IN HOLLYWOOD



Ken Loach's game-changing *Cathy Come Home*; below: Charlie Chaplin as The Little Tramp



not to see it. That's why I think there are movies about it. But it's not like Hollywood has remade *The Fisher King* – Richard Gere and Peter Mullan's films, like mine, are independent. All films, any film, is welcome. To be part of the discussion is really important."

In *Shelter*, Bettany directs his wife Jennifer Connelly and fellow *Avengers* actor Anthony Mackie as a couple who have lost everything but find each other on the streets. "An agent of mine, who will remain nameless, said you can't make a romance about homeless people because nobody wants to see them kiss," says Bettany. "I was so shocked by the awfulness of the statement. What I heard was how they were thinking of these people as something other. That was what I wanted to discuss and examine. To present two people who on paper are unforgivable then make you love them because people are lovable when you get to know their stories."

Films tackling homelessness is a trend set to continue into 2016. Pre-production is under way for *Hampstead*, starring Brendan Gleeson as a homeless man living on the Heath, and Diane Keaton as a wealthy American widow, who both take on property developers. The tale is based on a true story, as is, of course, the big screen adaptation of *A Street Cat Named Bob*, coming soon. But cinema has long had a fascination with homeless characters. One of its earliest icons was Chaplin's Little Tramp, who evolved from being a rambunctious vagrant in Keystone comedies to the lovable everyman, whose poverty was played as much for tears as laughter. Chaplin wrote in his autobiography that the character "became a man with a soul – a point of view".

In more modern times there's been a return to homeless characters being used to reflect social issues. The BBC's feature-length drama *Mr Stink* was a Christmas hit two years ago, reminding an audience of more than six million about the true meaning of the season, while last year's highest-grossing British film, *Paddington*, contained more heart and punch when it came to engaging with migration and how to house people than

most media and politicians have dared express.

Also scheduled for 2016 is a film that brings social commentary full circle. Fifty years after *Cathy Come Home* caused an outcry and debate in parliament, Ken Loach will release *I, Daniel Blake*. Like his 1966 game-changer, the film exposes those victimised and suffocated by the bureaucracy of a broken welfare system.

The film's screenwriter, Paul Laverty, wrote it as a reaction to the way poor people are often portrayed onscreen, in the media and in politics. "There's been a grand narrative created about picking on the poorest in society," says Laverty from *I, Daniel Blake*'s shoot in Newcastle. "You'll have seen endless programmes on various channels, what I call fascist TV, stereotyping strivers versus skivers. There is a punitive, judgmental element running underneath all these documentaries – it's really their own fault and if they just got off their arses and found work... These programmes often focus on people who are massively vulnerable, who have a drink problem, who are obese, who are shouting and swearing but when you talk to people at foodbanks you find many of them are in work, many have worked for many years then something has happened to them. You see the nuances, the contradictions."

I, Daniel Blake follows the struggle of a 59-year-old joiner who can no longer work after an illness. He meets a single mother of two forced to move from London to Newcastle because of the housing crisis crippling the capital. The film is a rage against the benefits machine, which hinders as much as it helps.

"If you look at the speeches from a lot of government figures, strivers versus skivers is a narrative they try to create," Laverty says. "Life's much more complicated – we have to break down and challenge that narrative."

Hector is in cinemas from December 11. Words: Adrian Lobb and Steven MacKenzie

SEE HECTOR FOR FREE

There are a number of special screenings of *Hector* around Britain to mark its release. These will involve director/writer Jake Gavin, a cast member and a local homeless charity representative talking about issues raised in and around the film. We have a pair of tickets for each of these for Big Issue readers. To claim your ticket, simply tweet @bigissue with #hectorscreening and the date and place of the screening of your choice. We'll pick the first winners on December 5.

December 7

Cineworld Haymarket, London
This is the premiere and will be followed by a very special Q&A with director Jake Gavin, star Peter Mullan and The Big Issue's chief John Bird.

December 9

Glasgow Film Theatre, Glasgow
Jake Gavin and Peter Mullan

December 11

Cameo, Edinburgh

December 12

Picturehouse Crouch End, London

December 13

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GIMME SHELTER

There but for the grace of God go I, says **Paul Bettany**

I didn't start off wanting to make a film about homelessness. I wanted to direct a movie, and then thought I might rather like to make one about judgement. I have this worry that in a world full of increasing grey areas we're becoming more entrenched in black and white positions.

I live in New York, on the Hudson River. There is a tiny triangular park on the corner of Canal and the West Side Highway where this homeless couple lived. I passed them every day on the school run and would try to talk to them. My kids would say good morning. But more and more, I'm ashamed to say, I began not to be able to see them. Somehow they became part of the landscape of the city I live in.

Then Hurricane Sandy happened. There was a mandatory evacuation of downtown riverside Manhattan. In the madness of getting my three kids, dog and cat and wife in the car, I didn't stop to think where they – my neighbours – would weather the storm. I never saw them again. I couldn't stop thinking about them. I'm sure they were fine and had moved on but I imagined what their lives might have been and

they became a template for a film about judgement. Why do we treat homelessness the way we do? I think it's got something to do with fear, a terror that one might end up there, so an absolute, resolute, this could never happen to me attitude – you must have done something yourself to bring yourself so low.

In New York, homelessness has spiralled out of control in the last 10 to 15 years. Social housing (I need to say public housing here because the word social gets everybody's back up in America) has been slashed by 32 per cent. There are 60,000 homeless people in the municipal shelter system every night – and 24,000 of those are children.

Last year in New York the first apartment for \$100m was sold – yet thousands are in the municipal shelter system every night. That is untenable but you'd be a fool and a communist to draw a line between rising rents and the lack of rising wages... Simply providing people with legal representation would stop a crazy amount of evictions. A homeless family is 80 per cent less likely to be evicted if they have counsel. Counsel costs the city \$12,500, while the average stay of a homeless family in a shelter is \$45,000. Morally it makes sense but it also makes sense politically.

The state of Utah has hugely reduced homelessness by thinking outside the box [the local government worked out it was cheaper and more effective to house homeless people rather than keeping them on the streets]. That seems to be paying off. Of course, in a capitalist society people are screaming, "Nanny state!" and, "How can someone get something for nothing??" The problem is... it worked. It's difficult to ignore that fact. The reasons for homelessness are myriad; the loss of a job, loss of a family member, a breakdown, and yes, drug or alcohol addiction. Everybody has a story. Who am I to judge?

My father died recently. He was a very religious man. Whenever we passed a homeless person he would always say, there but for the grace of God go I. And I love that sentiment. It's an admission of how close we all are to slipping by the wayside.

When I was about 17 years old I had a family loss. I came down to London and ended up outside the boarding house where my sister was living. I used to throw a stone at her window and when the woman who owned the rooms was asleep, she would let me sneak in and sleep on the floor.

That was a huge period of time for me. I was not in my best mind. I was grieving, I was not well. There were times I didn't get into that room and slept on a park bench. I never thought of myself as homeless and I wouldn't want to overstate that but it absolutely felt that my safety and situation were precarious.

I busked for two years, playing guitar and singing. If I took sick I wasn't able to earn my living or feed myself. It was really frightening at that age. I went from having a house with parents who did everything for me to suddenly having to work if I want to eat. I was lucky enough to get one of the last grants and ended up going to school to study acting. **TEB**



Jennifer Connelly in *Shelter*

Shelter is out on Blu-ray and DVD on January 11.

Paul Bettany was speaking to Steven MacKenzie



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AUTHOR FEATURE

A woman of intelligence

Paddy Hayes uncovers the extraordinary story of Daphne Park, unveiled as a pivotal part of MI6

Queen of Spies is the biography of Baroness Daphne Park (1921-2010), who was a senior area controller in Britain's Secret Intelligence Service, popularly known as MI6. Park's entry to the secretive agency came about in World War Two when she served in the Special Operations Executive as a coding instructor and as a briefing and dispatching officer (responsible for dispatching secret agents on their missions behind enemy lines). After the war she joined MI6, serving in Paris, Moscow, Léopoldville (now Kinshasa), Lusaka, Hanoi and Ulaanbaatar. She is probably best known for her role in the overthrow and subsequent murder of Patrice Lumumba, the first prime minister of the independent Congo Republic.

From as long ago as I can remember, I have been fascinated by spies. Had I been born in a different country I might even have contemplated joining a spy service but the Ireland in which I grew up did not boast of one. So I remained a close observer of the espionage world and became an entrepreneur instead, safer if not so exciting. Spying is sometimes described as being the

second-oldest profession (prostitution allegedly being the oldest). Either claim may or may not be true, certainly the desire to know – usually in order to forestall – the intentions of one's enemies is a deeply embedded desire among most rulers and it has led to the creation of what is now a multi-billion pound global activity impacting on the lives of millions. The fascination I (and much of the public) have with the profession is easy to understand. Spying contains all the elements of drama. It has deception, dissembling, deceit, danger and occasional dollops of sex, though practitioners tend to play down that last aspect.

My interest in writing about Daphne Park stemmed from our meeting in the mid-1990s. With the ending of the Cold War, it was decided by the British government that the SIS/MI6 should be placed on a statutory footing. Human rights legislation, employment law and civil society were combining to make the continuation of its 'does not officially exist' status untenable. As part of this process (called 'avowal') Park was permitted to provide an interview for the BBC's *Panorama* programme on the work MI6 did. It was a heavily censored account but was still a first.

I'd been aware of her existence for some time. She had become 'known', mainly from her role in the overthrow of the Lumumba administration in the newly independent (Belgian) Congo in 1961 (described in detail in the book). Through a mutual friend I got in touch with her and arranged to meet for afternoon tea in the House of Lords (she was a peer by then) one sunny summer's day. I found her to be tough-minded, quite combative, steadfast in her distrust of the Russians and totally fascinating.

We did not stay in touch, she was too careful for that, but I followed her through the occasional interviews she gave to selected journalists; *The Daily Telegraph* was one, *The Times* another, she was interviewed by *Woman's Hour* on BBC Radio 4 and by Alan Judd (a former SIS colleague) for an address she gave to the Royal Society of Literature. All helped to build the picture.

The work a female intelligence officer (such as Park) and a male one does is essentially the same. When based overseas, both focus on three core things; the first is continuing to run the stable of existing agents ('sources') wherever they are based overseas, the second is to look for opportunities to recruit new sources (usually to meet a specific intelligence objective), the third is to seek out opportunities for what MI6 euphemistically refers to as 'technical attack' – in other words, places where it can plant listening devices and the like. Over Park's career the attitude to its woman officers altered significantly, pretty much in line with social attitudes generally. When she joined in 1948 she was one of only a couple of female officers in the intelligence branch, which numbered about 400/500, and would have been considered an oddity. Nowadays the proportion is close to 50/50.

Daphne Park passed away in 2010. Two years later I decided to write her biography and commenced my detailed research. I had the basic information on file and to this was added material from obituaries written by former colleagues. For the book I interviewed some 20 of her former MI6 colleagues, most on conditions of anonymity. I was helped too by her friends, former academic colleagues and students. The culmination is *Queen of Spies* – only the second-ever biography published about a Cold War career officer in MI6.



Queen of Spies is out now (Duckworth Overlook, £19.99). paddyhayes.com; queenofspies.com



5 BOOKS THAT SOUND INTIMIDATING BUT AREN'T THOMAS W HODGKINSON

1. TAO TE CHING Lao Tzu
I'm suspicious of people who claim vaguely to be "fascinated by eastern philosophy" but *Tao Te Ching* is packed with humour and practical wisdom. Best of all, it's short. Just a few thoughts on how to live in sync with the rhythms of the universe, written by a Chinese mystic 2,500 years ago.

2. THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS Albert Camus
A beautifully written (and pleasingly concise) essay on that most fundamental question: if life is meaningless, why live? Camus has the answers.

3. ORLANDO Virginia Woolf
Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf? Not the readers of this jaunty novella about an immortal transgender troubadour, inspired by the author's love affair with garden designer Vita Sackville-West.

4. SELECTED POEMS ee Cummings
Free-wheeling, lyrical, and showing an enjoyable preoccupation with love and sex. Poetry for anyone who needs persuading that poetry isn't boring.

5. SYMPOSIUM Plato
Symposium recounts a funny, insightful and passionately inspiring conversation about life's second-most fundamental question: what is love? The speakers include an aristocrat, lawyer, doctor, comedian, poet and a philosopher. All seem to have completely different ideas. Don't be put off by the title, which basically means 'binge-drinking session'.

Thomas W Hodgkinson and Hubert van den Bergh's *How to Sound Cultured* is out now in hardback (Icon Books, £12.99)



REVIEWS

THE LITTLE RED CHAIRS / AN ATLAS OF COUNTRIES THAT DON'T EXIST

Love hurts

I don't necessarily place much stock in book blurbs but if Philip Roth uses 'great' and 'masterpiece' to describe a novel, you kind of have to take a bit of notice. The book in question is **The Little Red Chairs** by Irish author Edna O'Brien.

I confess that I've never read O'Brien before, despite her being one of the most touted Irish writers of her generation, but I'm glad I have now because *The Little Red Chairs* is a work of great empathy and lyricism – a novel that deals with the darkest of subjects yet somehow manages to come out the other end with a scintilla of hope in its eye.

The first part of the novel concerns the arrival of a dark, handsome stranger in a small Irish village. Claiming to be a faith healer and poet, Vlad enchants the village, teaching the children, charming the women and impressing the menfolk.

But Vlad has a terrible secret; he is a Serbian war criminal, wanted for massacres and worse, with an international warrant out for his arrest. Oblivious to this, local woman Fidelma falls for Vlad and they begin an affair behind her husband's back.

Fidelma discovers that she's pregnant at the same time as the authorities catch up with Vlad, and the book is thrown into brutality as the repercussions of their actions spread.

I can't really say any more about the plot but *The Little Red Chairs* spreads its focus from Ireland to look more widely at the nature of evil, the concept of redemption and the idea of what love really means.

It also goes on brilliantly to give a voice to those so often under-represented in fiction, as in life – the refugees, the victims, the ordinary people from all over the planet caught up in the awfulness of war



Illustration: Dom McKenzie

and conflict, families torn apart, homes destroyed, lives wrecked.

It's clear from some of the subject matter that O'Brien has had to dig deep into the idea of evil in humankind, and it must have been a difficult book to write in many ways. But her lilting, sonorous prose style and unflinching eye for human stories end up making *The Little Red Chairs* a compassionate book, and her central ideas that home and family are wherever we can find them make it subtly but powerfully uplifting despite it all.

Changing gears a little bit next but still with some connection, the other book this week is Nick Middleton's fascinating

An Atlas of Countries That Don't Exist. Middleton is an acclaimed travel writer and geography academic, and in this beautifully designed and published hardback he looks at 50 formally unrecognised states around the world. What makes a country a country? How is that different from a state or a nation? It's a slippery subject, and the lives of many people fall into that grey area.

The places Middleton writes about range from the more familiar likes of Greenland and Tibet to the war-torn and disputed, such as the Crimea or Azawad in the Sahara. Along the way there are quirky hippy communes, communist enclaves, self-proclaimed states of indigenous populations and even a couple of theoretical nation states.

It's all delivered with grace and consideration, confirming that some of the most interesting stories in the world exist in the margins and at the edges of human experience.



The Little Red Chairs
Edna O'Brien, Faber & Faber,
£18.99, hardback, out now

An Atlas of Countries That Don't Exist Nick Middleton
Macmillan, £20, hardback, out now

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No One Wants To Be Alone At Christmas

Few emotions are more severe or heart-breaking than loneliness. Anyone can be affected, at any age, but one can only imagine how difficult it must be for older people to cope if they are geographically isolated or emotionally disconnected from friends and family.

The epidemic of loneliness in Britain's elderly population has got to such an extreme that latest statistics reveal that over 51% of all people over 75 live alone and 5 million older people say the television is their main form of company

That's why Promedica24 has launched its latest campaign "No One Wants to Be Alone At Christmas" to ensure that seniors are not left isolated this winter, yet can live independently, with a free downloadable guide to give advice on how older people can build friendships, social networks and access services to help combat loneliness. Visit www.promedica24.co.uk for your free guide.

There is still a stigma surrounding loneliness and older people tend not to ask for help because they have too much pride. Despite being lonely is difficult at any time of the year, winter often can be the toughest time for many senior people who may suffer

from low mood due to the darker nights, become isolated because of colder weather and harsher conditions or feel more alone during the holiday season.

Promedica24 offers a number of options to give peace of mind that your loved ones are cared for this Christmas, with care packages providing assisted-living and companionship, for example:

- **'Living Independently'** makes life more simple and provides support for daily tasks such as shopping and prescription collection, as well as maintaining personal budgets and diary support. This allows people to continue living a life they want and are accustomed to.
- **Short Term Care & Support** – offers people the option of live-in care at home for a 2-6 week period. We offer enhanced recuperation following departure from a hospital stay, respite care to



give a family member a break or holiday care to provide support whilst the family goes on holiday

ProMedica 24 is Europe's largest provider of live in care and support services, helping people to live as independently as possible in the comfort of their own homes. Promedica24's live-in care teams are made up of fully trained and skilled care and support workers who are experienced in a range of conditions affecting seniors. Their clients are assigned a contact person who is available locally to find the best care worker to suit their needs and arrange all the formalities including legal employment of a care worker and the scope of duties and responsibilities. For more information regarding Promedica24's expert care and support for assisted-living and companionship for your loved ones at affordable prices, please contact Promedica24 on: 0800 086 86 86

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SCREEN



FILM / EDWARD LAWRENSON

Let the land sing

Agyness Deyn's quiet radiance punctures the grim melancholy of this adaptation of Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *Sunset Song*

A camera glides slowly over a field of ripe corn to find a young woman, lying unseen among the tall yellow stalks. She pulls herself up and into full view to admire the scene.

This is the luminous opening shot of a new adaptation of *Sunset Song*, Lewis Grassic Gibbon's classic 1932 novel set in rural Aberdeenshire before World War One. The young woman is Chris Guthrie (Agyness Deyn), daughter of a local farmer, and it's entirely appropriate that we should be introduced to her as she emerges into the soft sunlight. Women in this dour, tradition-sodden world are rarely seen, and if they are, it is in the dark, cramped interiors of the farmhouse, waiting for their menfolk who work the fields. Not so Chris, whose quiet defiance of accepted wisdom and deeply felt, almost spiritual, attachment to the land around her provide this exquisitely made film with its sweep and emotional grip.

The director Terence Davies' past work includes *The House of Mirth* and *The Deep Blue Sea*, both delicate period melodramas acutely attuned to the predicament of women trapped by the circumstance and convention of the day. There are echoes of these desperately poignant earlier films in

Sunset Song. Still in her late teens at the start of the film, Chris is an outgoing, bookish youngster with ambitions to teach. But these bright prospects hinge on the approval of her father, and you quickly realise she's unlikely to get this from the hardened bully who looms over her home life.

Played by Peter Mullan with a saturnine scowl, often lurking behind storm clouds of pipe smoke, Chris' father is a frightening portrait in distorted male authority. After years of buckling under his violent temper, her mother (a heartbreaking Daniela Nardini) is a fretful wreck. At one point, Chris sees her mum quiver with distress and instinctively envelops her in a hug. It earns Chris this maternal advice: "You'll need to face men for yourself. When the time comes, there's no one can stand and help you." It's a signature moment from a film that combines big teary emotional gestures with terse (very Scottish) pronouncements of flinty fatalism.

Of course, her mum is right. Chris does need to stand alone – and sooner than she thinks when a series of cruel, unexpected

events see her live alone with her father, a life she resigns herself to when, in one of the most poignant moments, she carefully packs away her beloved books.

It's grim stuff; this portrait of Chris living under the brutish influence of Mullan's embittered patriarch would be hard to watch without Deyn's radiant turn. A former model, she carries the film superbly in a performance of keening stoicism: her suffering is vivid but she's no martyr. There's a break in the gloom: marriage to the boyishly charming Ewan (played by Kevin Guthrie) earns her some happiness. But like the Aberdonian sun that falls on Chris in the opening shot, you suspect it can't last – and pretty soon, Chris' resolve is tested further when war breaks out.

An authentically textured evocation of pre-World War One society – the anachronistic dialogue, delivered in broad Aberdonian accents, is a bold, not to say reckless, box-office decision – this is a film of impressive formal restraint and powerful emotional turbulence. *Sunset Song* isn't as accessible as this year's two other Edwardian dramas, *Suffragette* and *Testament of Youth*, but I feel it's a better picture: as the title might suggest, it's shot through with a melancholy lyricism and evanescent twilight splendour.



Julie Christie and Omar Sharif in *Doctor Zhivago*

FINAL REEL...

Now entering its final month, the BFI's *Love* season is a celebration of romantically inclined cinema that includes a rerelease of the swoony *Doctor Zhivago*, free archive content on their online player and intriguing events like a *Brief Encounter*-tribute tea dance.

CHLOE KNOWS
SLEEPING ROUGH
CAN KILL.
AT LEAST SHE HAS
SOME OPTIONS.

- ☐ Tell him to get a hospital bed
- ☐ Can't afford to sleep in a bed
- ☐ Sleep with a stranger

The other option is YOU. Please give a homeless young person a safe bed this Christmas.

It's not much of a choice. Chloe knows one more night sleeping rough could be her last. Just being homeless you are twice as likely to die.* Yet with nowhere to go, no food and no money, Chloe is completely alone. She's at high risk of assault, hypothermia or suicide. And as the cold, winter weather gets worse, her only choice is to find a bed, any way she can.

But you can give her another option. Just £15 could give her a warm, safe room, hot meal and support in rebuilding her life. This Christmas, there will be around 15,000 young people, who can feel forced to take desperate measures, simply because they've nowhere to sleep. They all need another option. Please let that option be you.

£15 will help give Chloe a safe bed this Christmas. Please call 0800 138 0473 or visit centrepoin.org.uk

This is a true story, but to protect the privacy of those we help, a model has been used for the photograph.

- ☐ **£15** could give a young person a hot meal, warm, safe bed and someone to talk to.
- ☐ **£50** could provide someone with clean clothes, a warm, safe bed and essential health checks.
- ☐ **£100** could provide a warm, safe bed over Christmas plus the professional support these young people need to turn their lives around.
- ☐ **Other £** _____ (your own amount)
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*University of Sheffield, 2012. Please see centrepoin.org.uk/sasi for more details. Findings are based on data collected by CRESR in January 2010.

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centrepoin give homeless young people a future

MARVEL AT NETFLIX. CHRONICLE THE LIFE OF VIN DIESEL. LUTHER'S BACK



Netflix is already believed to be considering a second series of its Marvel show *Jessica Jones*. The streaming service already has *Daredevil* series two on its slate.

Vin Diesel is planning not just a fourth *Chronicles of Riddick* film but also a spin-off TV show by the name of *Merc City*. He'll likely turn his attention to them once he's done with *Fast & Furious 8*.

Fox appears to have pulled *Fantastic Four 2* off its release schedule. The film had been earmarked for a June 2017 release. The title has quietly been removed from Fox's list, however.



The return of *Luther* for a two-part series four has been confirmed. The first episode will screen on BBC One on December 15 – the concluding part the week after, on the 22nd.

Work is underway on a universe of GI Joe films. Paramount has hired screenwriter Akiva Goldsman to oversee a writer's room of scribes to come up with several new films in the series.

DEN of GEEK!
denofgeek.com

Photo: PA

FOCUS

Eric Idle

Python still looks on the bright side of life, especially in the morning

You have just finished touring the US with John Cleese. Were you sharing a tour bus? Yes. It's a good way to rest between gigs. But we stay at hotels. John has been delightful company. We really like each other and we have a lot of laughs about the *Daily Mail*, which insists we all hate each other.

That was a fly-on-the-wall documentary waiting to happen, surely? If you live in a country where there are flies on the wall, you should leave. The great fun about doing a live show is not being followed around by a TV camera crew. It was bad enough at the O2.

Was touring together better than having the rest of the team tagging along? Well actually yes. Michael Palin declined to do the O2 show anywhere else, and as he was by far the prettiest we decided to just leave anyone else called Terry behind.

Did you think you would be retired by now? I have done my damndest to retire but wives won't hear of such a thing.

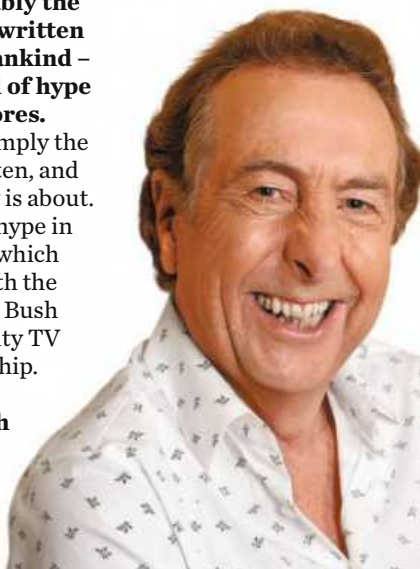
So you've written *The Writer's Cut*, probably the greatest book ever written in the history of mankind – and that is the kind of hype that the story explores. *The Writer's Cut* is simply the best book never written, and that is what the story is about. Procrastination and hype in the Post-Ironic Age, which I see as beginning with the election of George W Bush and the boom in reality TV where hype replaces hip.

The book deals with salacious 'kiss and sell' stories. Is that something people have always been interested

in or is it a modern media invention? Oh always – it's far from a modern phenomenon. You only have to read the memoirs that emerged from the court of Louis XIV to know how much more interesting is the shagging than the killing. The rather unpleasant Charles II is only memorable now for his mistresses.

The BBC keeps getting a kicking from all sides, what's your take? The BBC is kicked by the British press because it dared to expose them and how corrupt they were – tapping phones, hounding people, corrupting police and bribing politicians. It has been sent to Manchester as a punishment, and I hope it comes back fully chastened and smart enough to continue its most excellent existence

"An icon is for worship and I dislike being worshipped. I know just how God feels"



because it is one of the finest things Britain ever produced, after The Royal Society and the Cambridge Footlights.

You were in the Footlights and at Cambridge at the same time as Stephen Hawking, whom you involved in the O2 shows. Has he always been a fan? He was a research graduate when I was there. I remember one day he came into the Footlights Club at lunch time and did an extraordinary improv but he says he has no memory of this at all. It was incredible he agreed to run over Professor Brian Cox for us... He is a huge comedy fan.

After the Monty Python reunion, you noted you had graduated from "icon" to "legend". How does that feel? Any different? Yes, there's definitely a difference. Legend is one step nearer the grave, and also far less true. An icon is for worship and I find I dislike being worshipped. I know just how God feels at the weekend.

After legend, what's the next step up? Sadly, a step down.

Even so, do you still manage to always look on the bright side of life? Every morning, I do. I'm an optimist in the morning and a pessimist at night.

What's the secret? I laugh and smile and dance and sing. Oh, and read.

The Writer's Cut is out now (Canelo, ebook, £3.99)
Words: Steven MacKenzie
@stevenmackenzie

BROADCAST VIEWS

LUCY SWEET

Master of None is so trendy I should hate it. But I love it more than Nutella

Sometimes a Netflix series comes along that you want to devour in one go like a dirty great jar of Nutella. It's your little secret, between you and the sofa and the Netflix box that comes up and incredulously asks 'Continue watching?' because you've been glued to it for five hours and your buttocks have fused with the cushions.

Mine is **Master of None**, the new sitcom from *Parks and Recreation*'s Aziz Ansari. If you like smart, young wisecracking people in New York, trying to navigate the dating scene, it will be right up your alley. I'm a sucker for smart East Coast wisecrackery, especially if everyone's self-involved and neurotic and there's a cast list of failed actors, disinterested first dates, people talking fast in cafés, and subway masturbators.

Everyone drinks in trendy Brooklyn bars, worries about the composition of their text messages, and fails at relationships. As a middle-aged lady who mostly spends her time doing school runs and wondering what that stain is on her six-year-old H&M cardigan, it should be hipster anathema to me. I should be throwing things at the telly and yelling about how kids these days should stop drinking craft beer out of jam jars and do National Service.

But it's a wonder. Ansari is Dev, an aspiring actor, who bemoans the lack of roles for Indian actors (scientists, nerds, Uber drivers with ridiculously thick

accents). He's starring in a 'black virus movie' called *The Sickenings* as a (you've guessed it) scientist. In between times he's the voice of a yoghurt commercial, and is indecisively stumbling through a series of ill-advised dates with insane kleptomaniac waitresses.

As I said, it's very trendy. But *Master of None* deals with big issues – race, sexism – with an assured, light touch. Ansari is like Prozac, his squeaky loveable energy absolving him from his character's most self-indulgent eff-ups. He hangs out with dopey, faux-sophisticated Arnold (Eric Wareheim), who delivers the best performance in the show, and his uncompromising friend Rachel (Noël Wells). Ansari has also cast his real-life parents as his on-screen parents, a hilarious move – especially his mum, who spends most of the time dolefully looking at him like he's a complete idiot. Their lack of actorly chops gives the show a DIY feel. And there are cameos from pros like Buster Rhymes and Claire Danes. How cool is that?

The music is cool, the script is cool, even the credits are cool. Maybe, for that very reason, you'll hate it. Me and my stained cardigan loved it more than a family-sized jar of Nutella. I can only wish I was smart enough to come up with something like this. Continue watching? (Y)

@lucytweet1



OUT AND ABOUT



XMAS CLANGERS

Christmas, in an increasingly secular society, is now mainly about presents lighting up the faces of children. For those greying of hair who would like to be transported, if only fleetingly, back to their youth, then **Firmin and Postgate: The Making of Smallfilms** (until February 28, Canterbury; canterbury.co.uk/beaney) celebrates the pre-CGI geniuses behind *Bagpuss* and *The Clangers*. Their shows were, incredibly, made in a converted pigsty just outside Canterbury and show why limited resources will never quell powerful imaginations.

More toy-centric attractions are at **May the Toys be With You** (December 5–March 6, Canterbury; canterbury.co.uk/

beaney) – and it will focus, as the name suggests, on *Star Wars*. Vintage toys and film posters from the classic era (1977 to 1985) will be on display, wonderfully timed to coincide with the release of JJ Abrams' *Episode VII: The Force Awakens* when Jedi-mania will be at a high.

It's at this time of year, with cubic acres of cards being stuffed into pillar boxes, that Royal Mail is put under unimaginable pressure. That makes a visit to **Missing Post Office UK**



(until December 23, Birmingham; ikon-gallery.org) all the more poignant. Created by Japanese artist Saya Kubota, it lets you send the letters you've always wanted to write but didn't know who to send them to.

MUSIC

CLASSICAL / DAVID FAY

A musical homecoming

The **BBC National Orchestra of Wales** has returned to its wet and windy homeland after a tour of South America, which saw them perform in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. Several players spent the beginning of the visit in a Welsh home from home – about 7,000 miles away, in fact – in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the founding of Y Wladfa, the Welsh settlement in Patagonia. Harpist Catrin Finch, conductor Grant Llewellyn and a dozen orchestral musicians spent time in the remote region of Argentina, undertaking outreach work in schools, with youth orchestras and choirs, and performing to people in deprived communities who hadn't experienced classical music before. Joined by their orchestral colleagues, the full ensemble performed gala concerts in a wool warehouse in Trelew, converted into a concert venue for the occasion.

It was moving and revelatory for all involved, and shows the power music has to transform lives. The orchestra brought music back from its South American adventure in their suitcases and played works by Uruguayan, Mexican and Argentinian composers in an afternoon concert at the BBC Hoddinot Hall in Cardiff last Friday. But I'm sure their most significant souvenirs will be the memories of the communities they worked with, and the knowledge they gave something extraordinary to their Patagonian compatriots.

At London's Royal Festival Hall this week, piano virtuoso **Lang Lang** continues his three-concert residency with the Philharmonia Orchestra and its principal conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen. Last Thursday the curtain rose on the mini-series, with the famous opening flourish of Grieg's *Piano Concerto*, which preceded a semi-staged performance of his incidental music for Ibsen's play, *Peer Gynt*. Salonen's time with this orchestra has been marked by hugely successful and original semi-stagings. This one was no exception.



A BBC National Orchestra of Wales workshop in Argentina

Following on from this all-Grieg affair, things get classical at Tuesday's concert. Lang Lang will provide Mozartian meat in a Beethoven sandwich, performing the *Piano Concerto No 24* – a piece highly regarded by Beethoven himself. The evening starts with his festive *Namensfeier* overture and ends with the *Symphony No. 2*, the last he would compose in an overtly classical strain.

The residency reaches a climax on Thursday with a programme of 20th-century Russian music. Excerpts from Prokofiev's ballet score *Romeo and Juliet* – think the theme tune of *The Apprentice* – and his *Piano Concerto No 3* promise a lively start but things will get livelier for Scriabin's *Poem of Ecstasy*.

This sensational work is a fittingly explosive end to a musical partnership that will be hard to forget.

LAST NOTE...

The **Britten Sinfonia** is celebrating the 10th anniversary of its award-winning *At Lunch* chamber series, which features specially commissioned new works alongside established chamber repertoire. The birthday season began last Friday in Norwich with music for horn, violin and piano by Beethoven, Brahms, Huw Watkins and young composer Edward Nesbit.

@themerelister



The best letters will be shown at an exhibition next year in London.

You can dig into Christmas of the past in a number of ways this week.

Victorian Christmas



(December 5, Brentford, London; waterandsteam.org.uk) is, as the name very much implies, a recreation of Christmas in Victorian times, in an age of steam and water. It wasn't all cosy firesides and festive banquets back then, as **Victorian Christmas at the Workhouse** (December 4 & 5, Nottingham; nationaltrust.org.uk) will show what it was like for the destitute, with carols from a paupers' choir and dark stories of workhouse life.

You can also visit the sites of **London's Frost**

Fairs (December 5, various locations, London; museumoflondon.org.uk) where you will hear of how, when it was so cold the Thames actually froze solid, fairs would take place on the ice and why this shaped leisure time in the capital when temperatures plummeted.

But Christmas can be a lonely time for those on the margins of society. **12 Days of Giving** (December 1-12, Southbank, London; southbankcentre.co.uk) is a charity drive for people to donate items to families in the local area who rely on foodbanks. Each day is dedicated to different foodstuffs, so check the website and drop off what you can to make Christmas just that little bit brighter for some.

Eamonn Forde



Take a bow: the award-winning Britten Sinfonia

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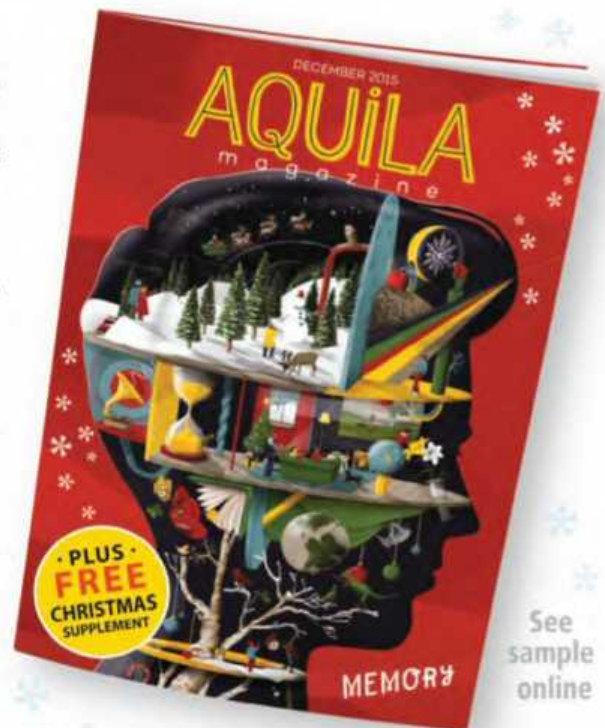
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PPA cover of the year

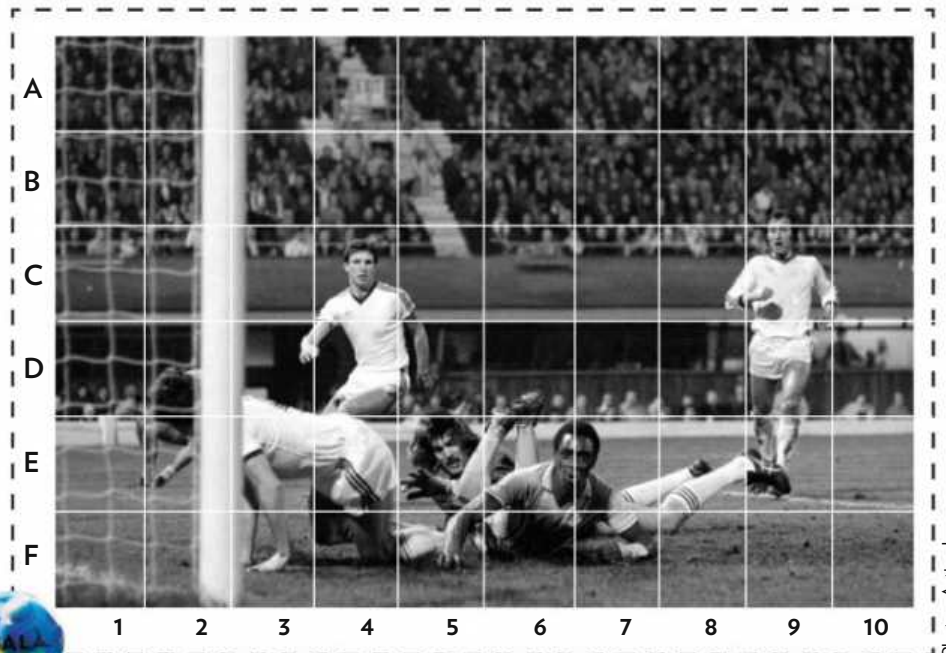


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GAMES & PUZZLES

SPOT THE BALL



Photos: Action Images

To win a Bala Fairtrade-certified football, mark where you think the ball is, cut out and send to: Spot the Ball (1182), Second Floor, 43 Bath St, Glasgow, G2 1HW by December 8. Include name, address and phone number. To enter by email, send your grid position (eg A1) to competitions@bigissue.com. Issue 1180 winner is Matthew Lidbury from Sheffield. balasport.co.uk



(Last week's Spot the Ball revealed:
Oldham V Chelsea, 1991)

Brain Teaser

How much can you predict about someone from what music they like?



A recent study of US college students (tinyurl.com/psy-q45) found that the answer is "quite a bit". Test your knowledge of these musical stereotypes by matching the genres Religious, Classical, Rap and Rock to the following descriptions:

- (a) Conscientious (b) Leads an exciting life (c) Not too concerned about national security (d) Physically unattractive (e) Prefers beer to any other drug (f) Prefers marijuana to cocktails (g) Prefers prescription drugs to marijuana (h) Prefers wine to beer.

Turn the page upside down for the answers.

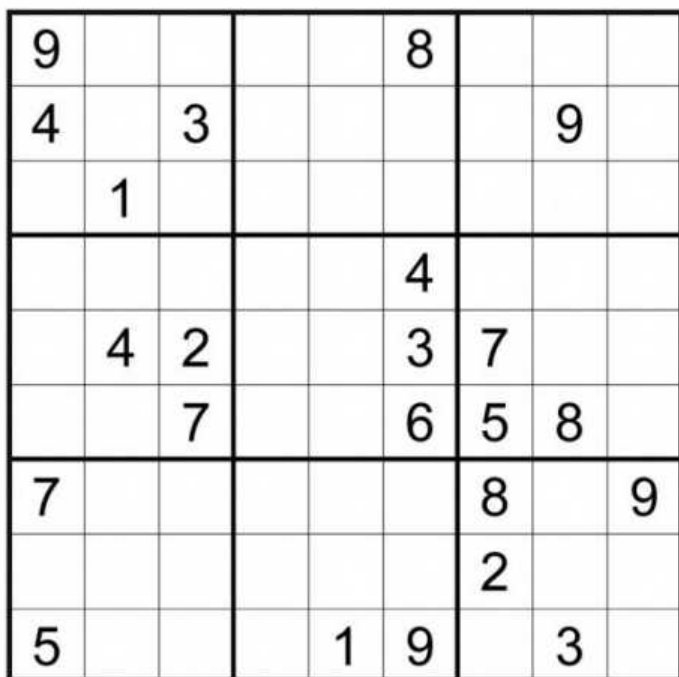
Okay, so these predictions are far from perfect but they're not bad. On a scale of 0-1 (where 0 means there's no relationship between musical taste and personality and 1 means that you can perfectly predict one from the other), this study found that for most traits - the relationship was about 0.25 in size. Answers: (a) Religious (b) Rock (c) Rap (d) Classical (e) Rock (f) Rap (g) Religious (h) Classical

Discover new truths in our weekly test, based on Dr Ben Ambridge's book, *PSY-Q*, a series of interactive tests of your personality, intelligence, moral values, thinking style, impulsivity, skill at drawing, capacity for logical reasoning, musical taste, multi-tasking ability, susceptibility to illusions (both visual and mental) and preferences in a romantic partner. Courtesy of Profile Books





SUDOKU

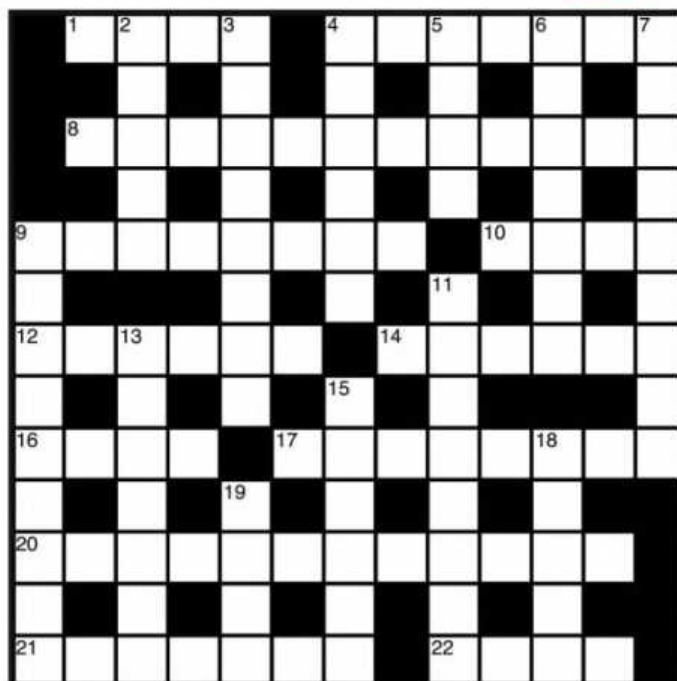


ISSUE 1181 SOLUTION

1	4	7	2	8	9	3	6	5
6	9	2	3	1	5	8	4	7
8	5	3	4	6	7	1	2	9
7	6	4	9	3	1	2	5	8
3	1	8	5	4	2	7	9	6
5	2	9	6	7	8	1	3	4
2	3	5	7	9	8	4	1	6
9	7	1	8	5	4	6	2	3
4	8	6	1	2	3	5	7	9

There is just one simple rule in sudoku: each row, column and 3 x 3 box must contain the numbers one to nine. This is a logic puzzle and you should not need to guess. The solution will be revealed next week.

PRIZE CROSSWORD



To win a Chambers Dictionary, send completed crosswords (either cryptic or quick) to: The Big Issue Crossword (1182), second floor, 43 Bath Street, Glasgow, G2 1HW by December 8. Include your name, address and phone number. **Issue 1180 winner is John James from Marshfield, Wiltshire.**

NEXT WEEK

CHRISTMAS KIDS' COVER!



Maya Jerram, eight, was 2014's cover star with this fantastic drawing of Santa. This year we've had an incredible 1000 entries – see next week's magazine with the winning entry as its cover if you don't believe us!

CRYPTIC CLUES

Across

1. Grill the small fish (4)
4. Gives an account of explosions (7)
8. Taking one's turn at the bran tub while having a swim (5,3,1,3)
9. Nothing that could be brittle first in the words of an opera (8)
10. We will be shortly when we recover (4)
12. Small stones left by the tomb (6)
14. Seize a fragment of a song (6)
16. Hit well below the belt? (4)
17. Remove sandals from one in France and prepare for action (8)
20. Certain to have nothing when it is as cold as possible (8,4)
21. Tried to avert sad eyes (7)
22. Test former graduate returning (4)

Down

2. Type of pencil mob mistake for explosive device (1-4)
3. Submitted and got plastered (8)
4. Rebut what could be true about two consecutive notes (6)
5. Meat for Spanish king (4)
6. Extreme temperature experienced at left-wing race (3,4)
7. Sheep lurch endlessly around tomb (9)
9. I tell sage about the way to make laws (9)
11. Remove a gag or the end of a gun (8)
13. Bill employs about one hundred charges (7)
15. Joined a football team (6)
18. Land included by Frank or Eamonn (5)
19. Enjoy oneself in a dramatic performance (4)

QUICK CLUES

Across

1. Healing ointment (4)
4. Medieval trombone (7)
8. Illustration before title page of book (12)
9. Drugs (8)
10. Burlesque (4)
12. None (3,3)
14. Price asked (6)
16. Boor (4)
17. Strict disciplinarian (8)
20. Become unruly (3,3,2,4)
21. Infinite (7)
22. Minute (4)

Down

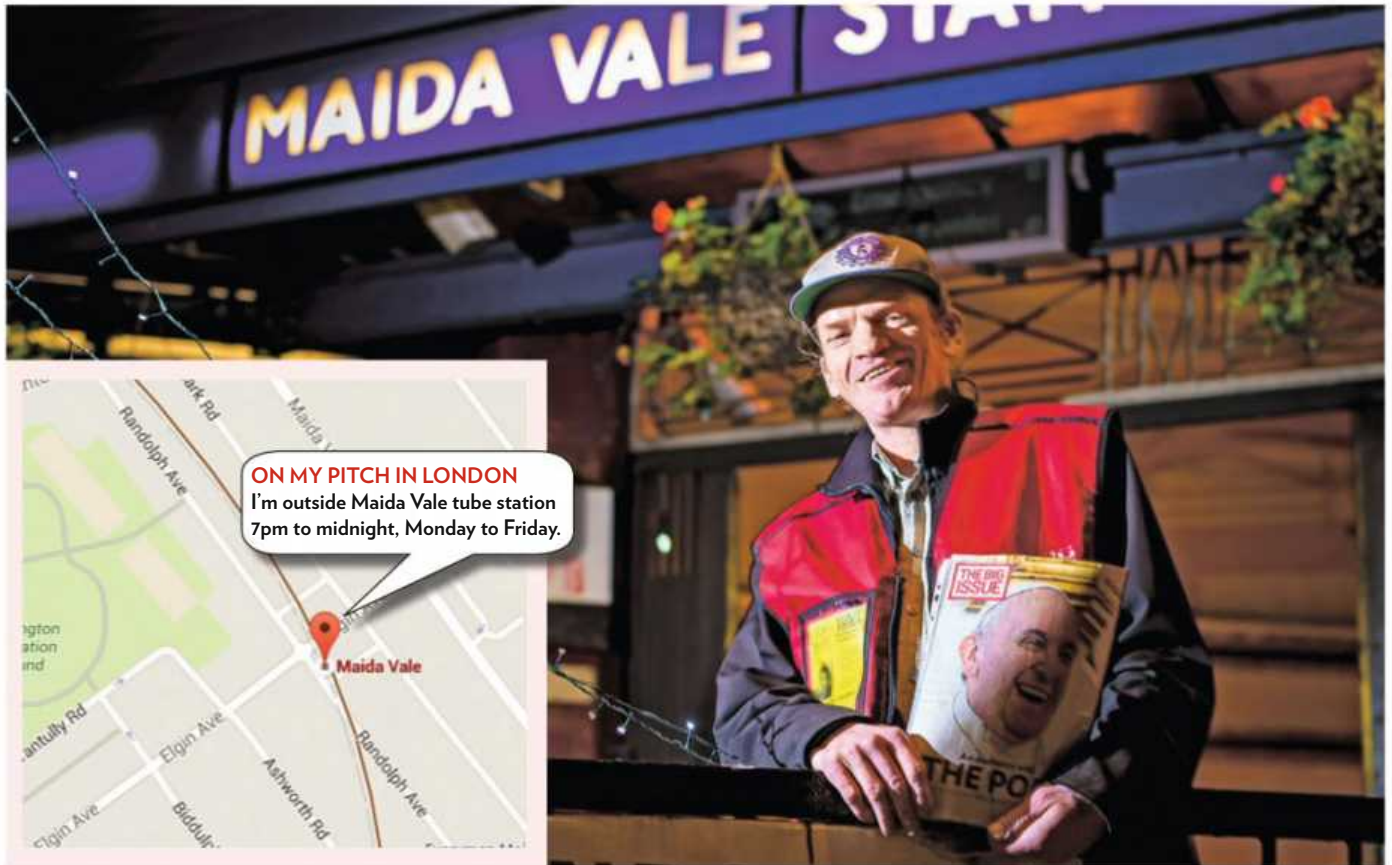
2. Pungent (5)
3. Threatening (8)
4. Very thin (6)
5. Sleeveless coat (4)
6. Large wave (7)
7. Medical attention (9)
9. Soliloquy (9)
11. Gossip (8)
13. Jeered (7)
15. Provincial dialect (6)
18. Silk voile (5)
19. Give off vapour (4)

Issue 1181 solution

CRYPTIC: Across – 1 Not so hot; 6 Pull; 8 Leaven; 9 Marina; 10 Night nurse; 12 Sexton; 14 Sermon; 15 Waterproof; 19 Settle; 20 Tea set; 21 Wear; 22 Sadistic. Down – 2 Owed; 3 Seven; 4 Handgun; 5 Tempt; 6 Pursuer; 7 Long stop; 11 Lebanese; 13 Treater; 14 Shouted; 16 Press; 17 Flags; 18 Levi.

QUICK: Across – 1 Two-sided; 6 Fido; 8 Spiral; 9 Glossy; 10 Widespread; 12 Misled; 14 Sedate; 15 Wholesaler; 19 Savant; 20 Blazed; 21 They; 22 Plethora. Down – 2 Wept; 3 Shrew; 4 Deluded; 5 Degas; 6 Floored; 7 Distaste; 11 Mishmash; 13 Lullaby; 14 Soluble; 16 Sit up; 17 Reach; 18 Year.

MY PITCH



Chris McCormack, 49

“Hugh Grant came over and talked to me for ages. An absolute diamond”

FACTS ABOUT ME...

MY FAVOURITE TEAM

Chelsea FC. I haven't been at Stamford Bridge for about four years, when my brother got tickets. I think José is still the best man to get us out of trouble.

MY FAVOURITE PLACE

I have fond memories of fishing along the Grand Union Canal with my dad when I was younger. I remember we caught a lot of coarse fish like bream, took them home and put them in the bath. My mum would freak out, so we'd take them back down the canal.

I started selling the magazine in the early 2000s. But because of my alcohol problems I couldn't keep it together – managing money and the discipline of it all. But I started selling again in Maida Vale a few years ago and it's gone really well for me.

It's given me confidence because of the respect you get from people. And it's given me some focus and helped me keep a handle on money, budgeting and so on. All that said, The Big Issue has had to help me through a tough time because the last few years have actually been murder for me.

My dad died of cancer last Christmas – December 28, at 8.30am. I had been looking after him for the last few years since he had a stroke. And I was trying to be his carer while I had some bad health problems

of my own. I had a bad chest infection, then I was in and out of hospital with a spinal infection. It's been tough.

I'm sofa-surfing at the moment but I'll be spending Christmas with my mum, in her council flat. Remembering dad at Christmas will probably hit me hard, hit me like a hammer actually. We were both big football fans, and I would have loved to go to one last Chelsea match with him but we did at least watch some games on TV together before he died. I'll remember that.

The support my customers gave me trying to get through things has been unbelievable. You've no idea what a difference it makes to have people who care and take an interest. I've sold the magazine at Notting Hill occasionally, outside the Electric Cinema.

Hugh Grant has come out of the cinema a few times, and he's come over and talked to me for ages, asked me how I've been. A really, really nice guy. An absolute diamond.

I've seen this part of London change a lot. I lived in Maida Vale for a long time and it's amazing to see the gentrification in west London. I remember when it was full of squats and punks in the 1970s, and now a one-bedroom flat around here would cost you upwards of £700,000 to buy.

I have to say a massive thank you to all my customers. I'd like to thank everyone by name but it would take too long. They know who they are. Have a great Christmas everyone.

Interview: Adam Forrest
Photo: David Tett

Why Not Be A Writer?

What our students say:



"I've been published in The Guardian and Good Life earning £400. **And now I've got my first book published by Bloomsbury called MOB Rule: Lessons Learned by a Mother of Boys.**

The Writers Bureau course provided me with structure, stopped my procrastination but most importantly it provided the impetus to try something different."

Hannah Evans, Winchester

"My total earnings so far are **£2,500."**

Victor Wright, West Midlands



"When I started the Writers Bureau course, I wanted to explore avenues for my writing and develop and strengthen my personal style. **I had no idea that it would lead to me being a published writer of novels and short stories.**

I still pinch myself when I receive emails and messages from readers who've enjoyed my work or when I give talks to book clubs and visit bookstores to do signings. These are magical moments that have changed my life – my dream has come true."

Jane Isaac, Northamptonshire

"As a result of my cricket articles, I have been elected into The Cricket Writers Club – an organisation that counts experienced journalists among its members. One of the perks of this membership is a press card that gives me entry into all of England's cricket stadium press boxes."

Martin Read, West Sussex



"I chose to sign with Ammonite Press, who had a reputation for producing high quality art and photography books."

Sarah Plater, Buckinghamshire

"When I first saw my words in print it was life changing. Someone else had read my work, believed in it, paid for it, and put it out there for others to see. As more articles made it to press, my confidence grew and I found I wanted to inject some of myself into my writing. At the time of writing this I have received **£1,197** for my work."

Kris Roberts, Somerset



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